

Go Native! Why Native Plants Matter for Pollinators

By Sarah Meadows, Hillsborough Garden Club

Over the last century we have lost 150 million acres of habitat and farmland to urban sprawl. Urbanization has fractured intact ecosystems into small plots of manicured monoculture yards containing exotic ornamental plants. The remaining isolated natural areas are not large enough to support wildlife, including pollinator insects. Some folks think that a bright green monoculture lawn might as well be paved, as far as its value to supporting wildlife that is important to our ecosystem.

Where are the butterflies? If you plant several wonderful flowers in your yard, but you attract few colorful butterflies, perhaps they don't see any of the native plants that their caterpillars will need to eat and eventually develop into the next generation of butterflies.

Caterpillars Are Bird Food! They are the larval stage in the butterfly life cycle. For example, research by the entomologist Doug Tallamy has shown that native oak trees can support over 500 species of caterpillars, whereas Ginkgo trees, a popular landscaping tree from Asia, can support only three. When it takes more than 6,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chickadees, it makes a difference. See Doug Tallamy here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLn5UCM_tv8.

Why natives? Observant gardeners have noticed that butterflies and native bees often fly right by showy exotic plants to feed on nectar-rich native plants. You increase the chances of having more butterflies, native bees and other desirable pollinators if you grow mostly native plants, and there are many beautiful ones to choose. Native plants are best because they require relatively little maintenance, watering, or care because they are adapted to a particular area. Native plants will attract butterflies native to the region. Caterpillars are very picky eaters

and will eat only very specific host plants; native plants provide these specific food sources.

Work Together to Make a Difference: Creating a network of biodiversity in our own lawns and gardens is vital to the preservation of many species including the bees, butterflies and birds that home gardeners seek to support. By creating a garden focused mostly on native plants, each patch of habitat becomes a part of a larger effort to support and sustain a healthy landscape for birds and pollinators. Native plants are those that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. They are the foundation on which life depends, including insects, birds and people. Without them, birds, butterflies and other wildlife, cannot survive.

Examples: Here are some native plants and the butterflies they support: Black Locust supports Clouded Sulfur and Silver Spotted Skipper; Spicebush attracts Palamedes Swallowtail and Spicebush Swallowtail; Passionflower vine supports the Gulf Fritillary; Common Milkweed attracts Monarch butterflies; and Smooth Beardtongue attracts the Common Buckeye. There are hundreds of options.

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/butterflies-in-your-backyard>

Want to learn more? The NC Botanical Garden <https://ncbg.unc.edu/> sells native plants and the NC Native Plant Society <https://www.ncwildflower.org> site provides information, including native plant nurseries/ sources throughout the state. Or join the Hillsborough Garden Club contact@hillsboroughgardenclubnc.org.

Buzzin' Around is an educational project of the Hillsborough Garden Club in support of Hillsborough as the 35th Bee City USA. Bee City USA[®] galvanizes communities to sustain pollinators responsible for 1 in 3 bites we eat and the reproduction of almost 90% of the world's flowering plant species – by providing them with healthy habitat, rich in

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a variety of native plants, and free to nearly free of pesticides. Bee City USA is an initiative of the Xerces Society. <https://www.beecityusa.org>.

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