

Pollinators in a Water Garden

By Ann Sebesan

A water garden can have a wide variety of plants that support pollinators. It can be a bowl on a patio or deck, a complex installation with waterfalls, or a simple hole in the ground filled with water. No matter which you choose, a water garden can provide hours of enjoyment.

When choosing a site, it is helpful to remember that most pond plants prefer full sun. However, most will do well in partial shade. Many beautiful plants are available in garden centers and through catalogs.

Water Lilies

On the first day a water lily flower appears, no pollen is released. A pool of fragrant liquid develops in the center of the blossom luring pollinators. When they land on the flowers, pollen already on the pollinators is washed off, thus fertilizing the flowers. After the first day of blooming, the center of the flower is dry. Then, the flower's pollen sticks to the insects who carry it to other plants.

There are two types of water lilies: hardy and tropical. The hardy are dormant during our winter but return in the spring. Tropical lilies cannot survive our winters here in North Carolina.

The flowers of hardy lilies rest on or near the water's surface. They have thicker, leathery leaves, and only bloom during the day. Their flowers, which are unscented, close each evening, and open again during the daylight hours.

The flowers of tropical lilies are raised well above the water's surface. There are both day blooming and night blooming varieties, some with

fragrance, and others without. Tropical water lilies are the only ones that have a variety with blue flowers. Their leaves are more ornate and delicate.

Lotus

The large flowers and leaves of the lotus make this plant a real standout in the garden. As perennials, they happily grow in a pond or in large pots of water above ground. Rhizomes anchor the plants and also serve as food storage. These can be invasive, so it is advisable to plant them in containers.

On the first day that they appear, the lotus' white, eight inch-wide flowers appear on two to six foot stems. They gradually turn pink on the following days. Leaves can reach two feet across. The woody seed pods are often used in floral arrangements.

An amazing characteristic of the lotus is its ability to regulate the temperature of its flowers within a narrow range, much like warm blooded animals do. Their temperature is maintained between 86- and 95-degrees Fahrenheit, even when the air temperature is as low as fifty degrees.

The lotus flower uses warmth and scent to attract pollinators. On the first night, when the flower closes, pollinators are trapped within it. Pollen that is already on the insect's body from other flowers is rubbed off. When the flower opens the following morning, the insect flies away with pollen for the next lotus it visits.

Water Hyacinth

Water hyacinths float on the water's surface like little balloons. Their lovely lavender blooms, resembling iris blossoms, are pollinated by bees and other insects.

Due to their invasive nature, do not release water hyacinth plants into natural waterways. Although they are considered tropical, needing nighttime temperatures of fifty degrees and above, they multiply rapidly and form mats that choke out fish and other plants when they are not controlled. In a home water garden here in North Carolina, old plants should be scooped out of the pond and replaced with new ones each spring.

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