It’s unfortunate that many people find the adage, ‘The only good bug, is a dead bug’, comforting. While some species of insects are annoying, about 99 percent of insect species are either harmless or beneficial. Almost 80% of our food is dependent on pollinators in the form of mostly insects but some animals, like hummingbirds and bats, as well. That includes daily fixes like coffee and chocolate!

Pollinators include many species of insects including bees, hoverflies, butterflies, moths, wasps, fly species, hummingbirds, bats and honeyeaters. Almost all of these pollinators are threatened by human activities such as habitat loss, use of pesticides, and introduced diseases but also climate change. Loss of pollinators not only precludes reduced pollination but also reduction in biological diversity.

Pollination involves the movement of pollen from one flower to another of the same species. It may be done by wind, in the case of corn or pine trees, water, or self-pollination, but most likely it is due to the efforts of pollinators, mainly insects. Pollinators need out help and even folks with small gardens or balconies can add plants that benefit the many species of pollinators.

Whether you have room for a pot or two on a porch or balcony, or oversee an acre or more of land, you can make a positive impact on our native pollinator populations. One key point to
remember is that native pollinators need native plants. While we have the modern tendency to
measure time social media posts, plant and insect interactions have occurred over eons.

Our native pollinators gravitate towards our native plant species. They are essential for
maintaining healthy local ecosystems. While they may be attractive to non-native plants,
sometimes these plants do not offer enough pollen or offer larval host sites to these pollinators.

We as gardeners are torn. Who can resist that absolutely exquisite double flowering scabiosa or
petunia even if they can’t offer prolific nectar? Gardeners, the decision is yours. One drop in the
bucket can be your aphorism. Each of us can make a small but imperative difference in helping
to build up pollinator populations that we all depend on.

If you can’t resist the allure of new gorgeous introductions, plant them in a small bed or
containers where you can admire them all summer. In your more extensive garden beds, set in an
abundance of plants for pollinators along with a few other plants of interest. Your gardening
philosophy will direct you.

Those interested in maximizing pollinator species need to offer nectar producing plants from late
winter through late fall. With derivations from normal seasons now becoming more prevalent,
our native insects are as confused, as we are, and often observed looking for nectar sources later
into the fall and earlier in the spring. Anything we can do to accommodate these unexpected
climate trends would be appreciated by them.

To help our pollinators, there are two things to focus on that are or utmost importance. One is to
plant as many native plants as possible. Our native pollinators have co-evolved over thousands of
years with them. These plants have evolved to offer enticing nectar or other benefits to the
pollinators which in turn serve to complete the fertilization process.

The second is to select plants attractive to pollinators from as early as possible in the growing
season, like witch hazels, pussy willows, and early blooming bulbs throughout the summer and
late into fall. This would support the greatest diversity of both pollinating insects and animals.
Also, be cognizant that some pollinators operate at night so include night blooming plants like
moon flower, night blooming primroses, chocolate daisies and others.

There are numerous annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees that support healthy pollinator
populations. Many are commonly found in our vegetable, herb and ornamental gardens. Included
in this list are squash, mints, basil, asters, sunflowers, milkweeds, goldenrods, asters,
coneflowers, hyssops and many, many more. Look up local pollinator plants and fill your
gardens with as many possible. Pollinators will be pleased and you’ll be creating a more
sustainable site for these essential and valuable creatures.
For more information on attracting pollinators or if you have any other gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu or your local Cooperative Extension Center.