



Bee Boys' Guide to Planting a Regenerative Pollinator Garden

Pollinators, including honeybees, enable reproduction of more than 75% of flowering plants and around 35% of food crops globally. They are key to sustainable ecosystems, thriving local biodiversity, and healthy soil.

A regenerative pollinator garden provides food, shelter, and breeding sites for birds, butterflies, honeybees, and other threatened pollinator populations, helping to further protect ecosystems, restore the health of the environment, support food sources for wildlife, and increase global food production.

Planting Tips: What You Need

To grow a bee-approved pollinator garden, you don't need acres of land or even a yard with a garden bed. With a few containers or pots, some potting mix, and seeds or young plants, you can easily grow a micro-garden on your patio, porch, or lanai.

Containers & Seeds

When choosing what to grow your regenerative garden in, opt for pots, planters, and containers made of terracotta or ceramic, untreated (and unpainted) wood like cedar, or metal. Avoid using plastic, as its poor breathability can lead to overwatering and root rot, and lack of insulation can result in overheating. What's most concerning is that plastic containers can leach chemicals into the soil which are in turn absorbed by your plants... and possibly you if the plants are edible!

When it comes to seeds, non-GMO is the only way to go in your regenerative garden. Or visit your local organic nursery for help selecting non-GMO keiki plants.



Pollinator Zones

If you already have a garden and want it to be more inviting to bees, create a pollinator zone by placing containers around the garden. Or grow pollinator-pleasers like marigolds directly in the garden as companion plants between herbs and vegetables like basil and tomatoes (yes, we know they're a fruit, but you get the picture). You can even tuck them in between your fruit trees or flowering shrubs. See our list below of the best bee-friendly plants for your pollinator garden.



Clusters & Layers

The bees will be happiest if you grow the same species of plants in dense clumps or clusters rather than single plants growing here and there. Plant groupings make it easier for the honeybees to find your garden. And go big or go home, because the larger the grouping, the more attractive the bees will find it.

Don't just stop at clusters. Entice all pollinators through layers - Grow shorter plants like shrubs in front of tall ones. The bees embrace diversity, so honor that with flower structure types that range from long and tubular to short and stout.

Diverse & Native Species

When planning your pollinator garden, make sure to include plants that are native to your area, since they're the best food source for native birds and insects. Select an array of diverse plants featuring leaves and flowers of different colors, fragrances, and shapes. To ensure that the honeybees have a constant food source, opt for a wide variety of plants that bloom in succession, rather than all at once.



What to Avoid

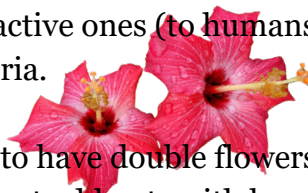
No Place for Pesticides

If your goal in planting a pollinator garden is to protect the honeybees from the population decline that climate change, habitat loss, and pesticide use can cause, then there are a few things you should avoid for the sake of their health (and ultimately the planet).

Pesticides and herbicides are highly dangerous to all pollinators and have no place in a regenerative bee garden. Fertilizers with synthetic chemicals should also be avoided for the same reasons. To keep pests at bay, grow natural pest repellents like organic thyme and citronella in your regenerative garden

Showy Blooms Aren't Everything

Many ornamental plants are selected for their showy blooms, but not all plants are a sufficient source of the nectar and pollen that bees need for nutrition. In Hawaii, where the climate is mild year-round, it's especially important to prioritize nutritionally beneficial plants over the most attractive ones (to humans anyway) like bougainvillea, bird of paradise, ginger, and plumeria.



Also low on pollen and nectar are plants with hybrid flowers, especially those bred to have double flowers. If you are already growing these hybrid flowers, there's no need to uproot them! Just add pots with bee-friendlier plants in between the hybrid plants.



Steer Clear of Invasive Species

Certain exotic plants that attract our bee friends can be troublesome for Hawaii's native forests, spreading aggressively, crowding out native ecosystems as they spread, and destroying native habitats in the process. To protect Hawaii's ecosystems, it's best to leave the following highly invasive plants out of your landscaping and /or pollinator garden: False heather, lantana, strawberry guava, albizia, miconia, night-blooming jasmine, kahili ginger, banana poka, ivy gourd, and barbados gooseberry.

What to Plant

Fortunately, there are many native and non-native plants that you can include in your pollinator garden that are both nutritionally beneficial and non-invasive, from plants with vibrant flowers to edible herbs.

Flowers

The gerber daisy has large, brightly colored flowers that are easily accessible to honeybees. Easy to grow and tolerant of drought and poor soil, the cosmo's edible flowers are also excellent for adding texture to your garden. Bees find signet marigolds (or gems) attractive as a pollen source and are especially fond of lemon, red, and tangerine marigolds. The marigold's leaves are also edible... and they may help to deter soil pests that could otherwise wreak havoc on your garden.



Edible Garden

Cucumbers, pumpkins, watermelons, and other members of the gourd family rely on pollination by bees for fruit or seed production, as do winter melon, lilikoi (yellow passion fruit), and other plants commonly grown in Hawaii.

From their seeds and petals to their leaves, sunflowers are also stunning, edible, and highly attractive to multiple species of bees. While honeybees will visit any sunflower for both its pollen and nectar, they are extra fond of big smile sunflowers and other heavy pollen producers, including chocolate sunflowers and florenza sunflowers.

Herbs

Herbs do well in containers or window boxes, making them an ideal option if you don't have a ton of outdoor space to work with. Many herb species that are perfect for your garden are also excellent forage for honeybees, including mint, sage, lavender, parsley, rosemary, oregano, dill, thyme, and basil.



When left to bolt, basil is especially enticing to foraging honeybees. If you're wondering what kind of basil to plant, you can't go wrong with aromatic Genovese, lemon, or Thai basil.

Starflower (or borage) is another herb to plant, as its leaves are edible for humans and its flowers are adored by bees. And the fast growing herb buckwheat has open-shaped flowers that produce a plethora of nectar and pollen, making it a favorite among honeybees and other smaller bees. Thriving in moderate temperatures, it can also serve to fill in gaps in your garden in between harvests, bring nutrients to the soil, and suppress weeds.

Hawaiian Plants

There are several Native Hawaiian plants that can attract pollinators, including the Ohi'a lehua tree. Known for its gorgeous pom-pom like flowers, the Ohi'a lehua can be found providing food and habitat for native insects and birds, as well as pollinators, in almost every native Hawaiian ecosystem ... and it makes a hardy addition to home gardens too!

The native Naupaka draws in honeybees, butterflies, and other pollinators with its fragrant, white and purple-veined flowers, which are a consistent source of pollen and nectar year-round. Naturally found in coastal ecosystems, the versatile shrub is wind, sun, and salt-tolerant, low-maintenance, and can be grown in nearly every form of landscape, including pollinator gardens.



Two native hibiscus plants to consider are the Koki'o kea and the 'Akiohala. The Koki'o kea, or native Hawaiian white hibiscus, is one of the only species of hibiscus on the planet that is fragrant, which always impresses pollinators. And bees appreciate that the Koki'o kea is a reliable source of nectar and pollen, which can easily be accessed because of its flowers' open structure.

The 'Akiohala, or native Hawaiian pink hibiscus, has open, cup-shaped flowers that bloom year-round, offering a rich source of pollen and nectar to support honeybees and local pollinator populations. When bees visit this particular blossom, the 'Akiohala's unique purple pollen covers their entire bodies, so they naturally repay the plant through cross-pollination.



Now that you know what you need, what you should avoid, and what to plant, it's time to get growing and enjoy sharing the beneficial beauty of your regenerative pollinator garden with the bees! Happy gardening!

