Wildlife Express

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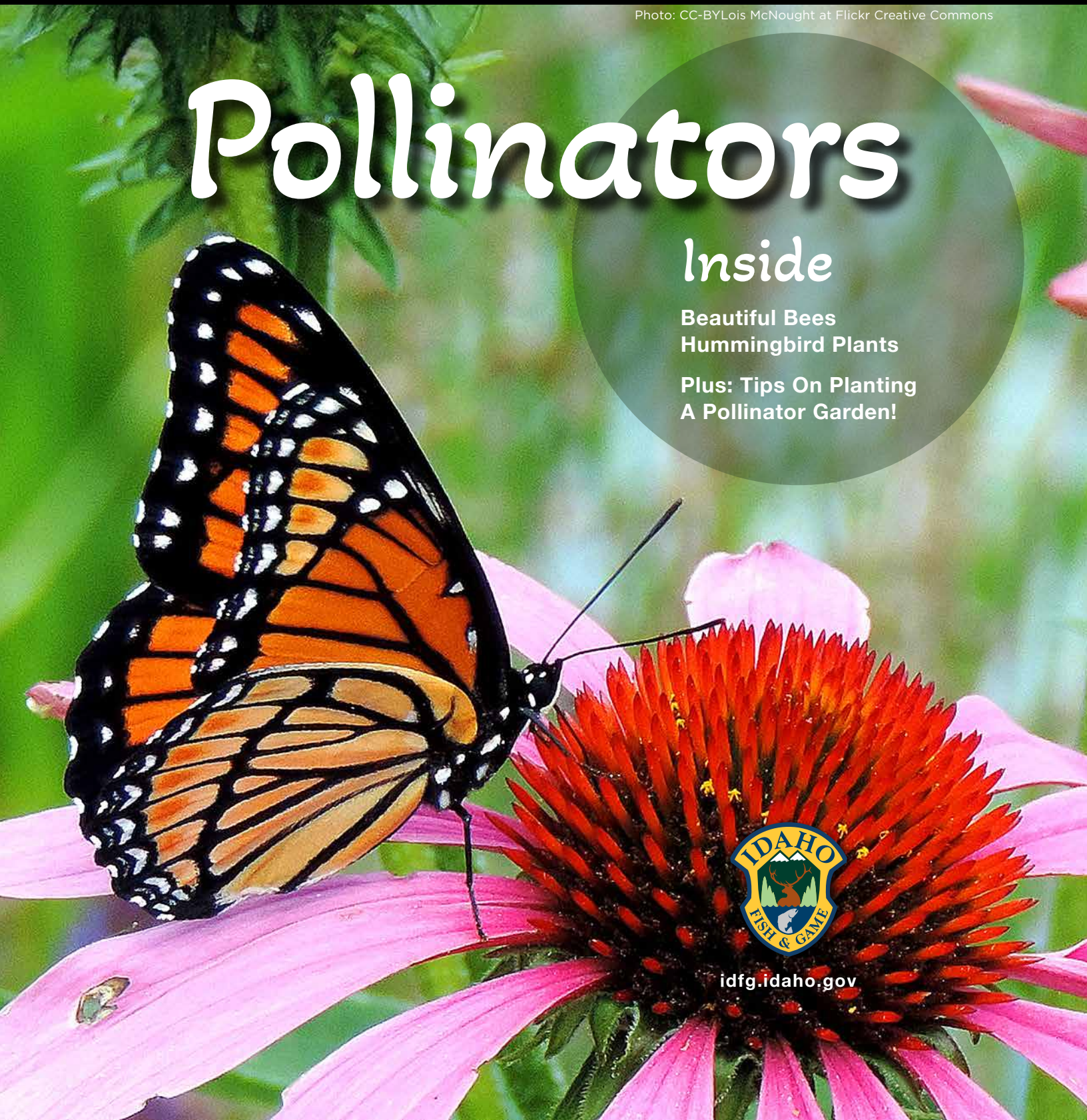

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Pollinators

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Hummingbird Plants

Plus: Tips On Planting A Pollinator Garden!

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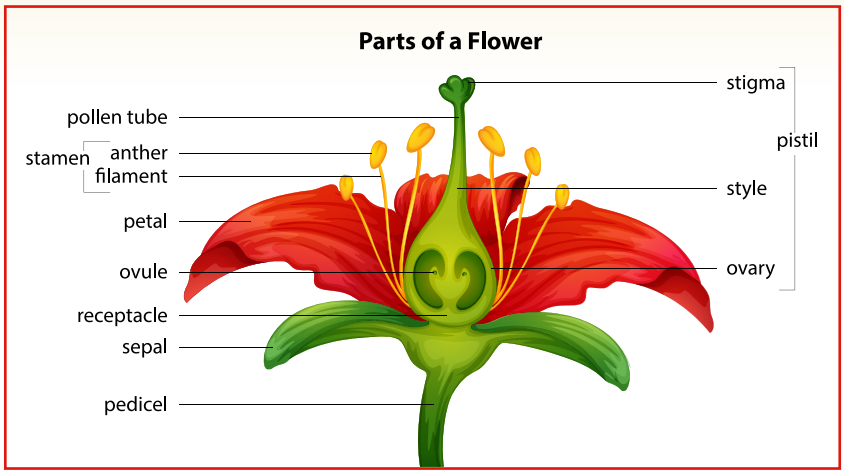
Pollinator Appreciation



Spring is in the air, which means summer is right around the corner in Idaho! For many of us, this is our favorite time of year. It's the perfect time to learn about pollination and pollinators! They are busy pollinating many kinds of plants that we depend on. They are seeking pollen and nectar for food. In the process, pollination occurs!

Let's discuss the basics of pollination, to understand why pollinators are so important.

Pollen is a powdery substance on plants. Pollination is the transfer of pollen from the male part (anther) of the plant to the female part (stigma). It's how plants reproduce or duplicate. Pollination must happen before a plant can create a fruit or seed. As you know, seeds bring us new plants. Many different animals help to pollinate plants.

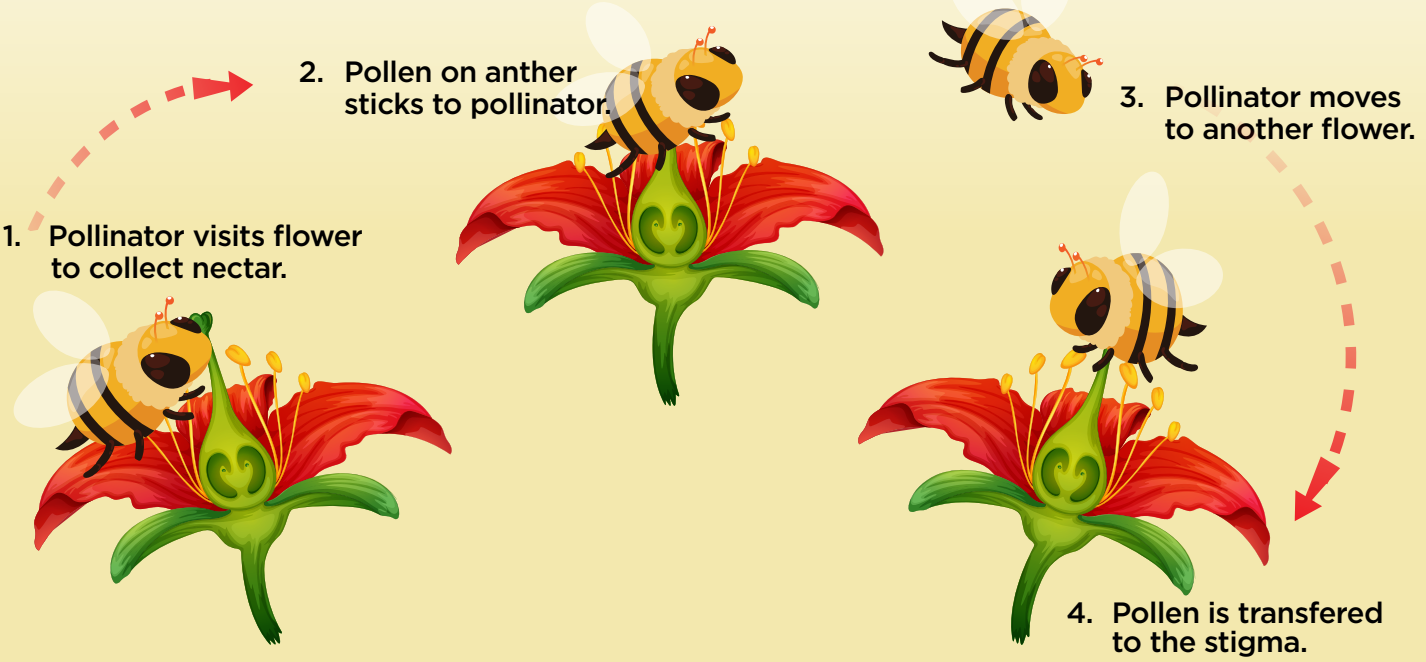
When animals pollinate plants, they help to create food for wildlife and humans.

When an animal lands on a flowering plant, pollen sticks to it. The animal then goes to another flower searching for more nectar and pollen. The pollen from the first flower drops on the part of the second flower, the stigma, that needs to be fertilized for producing a seed.

The animals do not do this intentionally. They're just looking for nutrients. It's a mutually beneficial aspect of nature. Nature knows best.

Plants provide us with the food we need to survive. We are fortunate that pollinators do the hard work to make plant reproduction happen. Pollinators are to be thanked for 1 in 3 bites of the food we eat!

The next time you see a flower, look for the male and female parts of the plant that need pollination! Understanding the process of pollination helps you to understand how these beneficial animals help us to survive.



Beautiful Bees

When you're playing outside, you may hear the unmistakable sound of a bee buzzing nearby. The sound may make you nervous or jumpy. That's ok. You were most likely taught that "bees" are bad because they can sting. The truth is bees prefer not to sting you!

The words bee, wasp, yellow jacket and hornet are all used to describe any number of yellow, orange, brown and black insects that fly around our neighborhoods. To understand the differences between these insects, you need to know more about each of them.

Bees are usually round and hairy, some more than others. To collect pollen, bees visit a lot of flowers. When a bee lands on a flower, pollen sticks in its hairs. They may go to another flower and some of the pollen falls off. They've pollinated that flower! Bees also brush pollen off their bodies with combs on their legs. The pollen is then collected in "baskets" found on their hind legs. This helps them carry pollen back to their hives.

Bee With Pollen Basket

Bumblebees are master pollinators because of their shape, size and hairiness of their bodies. They can get farther into the plant and can carry a lot of pollen to the next plant or back to their nests.

Only honeybees, bumble bees and wasps create hives or colonies to live and reproduce. They are called social bees and have elaborate systems of communication. They tend to be a bit more territorial because they want to protect their hives.

Top Photo Honeybee: CC-BY Ken Slade at Flickr Creative Commons, Bottom Photo, Pollen basket on bee: CC-BY Brian Lawless

Most bee species are solitary. They live alone. Their primary goal is to eat and gather nectar and pollen for their offspring. Many solitary bees lay an individual egg with pollen in a separate chamber. Idaho has many solitary bees. Look for mason bees, leafcutter bees and carpenter bees.

A more aggressive insect that looks like a bee and is often called a bee, is actually a wasp. Wasp bodies are slender, smooth and shiny. They have a narrow waist and long legs. Colors vary but they often have shiny skin. Hornets are a type of wasp. They are usually larger than wasps and have a more robust body and a wider head. Yellow jackets are also a type of wasp. They are smaller with a shorter, stockier body. They are mostly black and yellow with noticeable bands on their abdomen.

Because wasps are social, remember they are more aggressive. Protecting their hive is very important to them.

They also are more aggressive because of the food they eat. They do pollinate, but they also prefer to eat insects. They are carnivorous and often are interested in the food we eat. This is why people tend to get stung by them.

Wasps are actually very beneficial insects. They can help a farmer by eating many of the insects that damage crops like corn.

Hopefully, next time you hear a bee or wasp outside you will feel happy and thankful. The beneficial things they do for us far outweigh the harm.

Mason Bee: CC-BY Richard Surman at Unsplash.com, Paperwasp: CC-BY Patty O'Hearnkickham at Flickr Creative Commons
European Honeybee in Milkweed: CC-BY Idaho Fish and Game

Monarch on
Butterfly Bush

Flowers:
Beacons for Insect Pollinators

Most all plants we eat are pollinated by animals. Insects (bees, beetles, flies and more) pollinate more than 200 kinds of crop plants in the United States alone. Carrots, apples, tomatoes and berries would no longer be available if we lost these hungry nectar seekers.

Plants need to be seen by pollinators. They have developed many ways to help insects to see them. The traits that they have can include color, flower shape and size. Plants also might produce different amounts of nectar and present pollen in different ways.

Insects see colors differently than we do. A bee looking at a red flower would see the color black. When ultraviolet light hits the red color, bees see a glowing purple. Most butterflies are also drawn to red flowers because of the ultraviolet light the flowers reflect.

Some butterflies like groups of small flowers close together. A butterfly bush has flowers in clusters. The butterfly can sit and sip nectar from many flowers without having to move. It doesn't need to use as much energy while it's eating.

Small, delicate flowers might work well for butterflies, but not bumblebees. Bumblebees are a bit beefier than butterflies. They need flowers with larger petals to support their heavier bodies. In Idaho there are many native plants that are ideal for them. Columbine, lupine, coneflower are just a few native flowers from which bumblebees can easily sip nectar.

Next time you're out and about, become a plant detective and see if you can determine what plants would be best for what insects!

Hummingbird Plants by Design

Many flowers in North America depend on hummingbirds for pollination. These plants do everything they can to make sure that hummingbirds find them!

Most hummingbird flowers droop down toward the ground. Drooping flowers do not give insects the landing pad they need, but hummingbirds can hover. They can easily hover to sip nectar from drooping flowers.

Many of these flowers are red or yellow. Hummingbirds can see red and yellow, but most insects cannot. Hummingbird flowers usually do not smell. Smelly flowers attract insects, not hummingbirds.

Hummingbird flowers also contain large amounts of nectar. Hovering takes a lot of energy. Flowers need to make sure the hummingbird gets a big reward for the energy it takes to hover and sip nectar.

To drink nectar, hummingbirds need long, straight bills. Often the bill is matched to certain flowers. This helps keep competition for nectar lower than if all hummingbirds' bills were the same length.

Tiny Calliope hummingbirds have a short bill compared to other Idaho hummingbirds. This allows them to feed on flowers with short tubes like scarlet gilia (Gil-ee-ah). Their flower tubes are too short for other hummingbirds.

Black-chinned hummingbirds have longer bills. They can easily reach the nectar in longer flowers like penstemon (PEN-stem-on).

As a hummingbird feeds, its head and face get brushed with pollen. Many flowers are designed to make sure hummingbirds get a good dusting of pollen.

As a hummingbird moves from one flower to another, it transfers the pollen, fertilizing the flower.

By pollinating its food source, the hummingbirds make sure they will have food again next year.

Butterfly Bounties

We have some interesting butterflies in Idaho, and they all have their own needs.

Butterflies are known for being nature's transformers. They change as they go through their life cycles. All butterflies start their life as an egg. They hatch out into a caterpillar, change into a chrysalis and then become adults. They go through a complete metamorphosis.

At each stage of life, butterflies have different food needs. Caterpillars are picky about what they eat. The adults are usually happy drinking nectar from just about any flower.

There are a few butterflies that don't like to drink nectar.

Monarch

Mourning cloak butterflies may sip tree sap or rotting fruit. Lorquin's and red admiral butterflies sip bird poop for nutrients!

Did you know, southern Idaho is home to the smallest butterfly in the world? The western pygmy-blue is only about the size of a dime. The caterpillars eat the leaves, flowers and fruits of plants. Adults drink nectar from many different plants found in the desert.

Idaho's largest butterfly is the two-tailed swallowtail. The caterpillars of this butterfly really like the leaves of ash and cherry trees. The adults drink nectar from all sorts of flowers.

Keep an eye out for butterflies. They themselves not only add color to our lives, but they also add color to the landscape with the flowers they pollinate. Be sure to plant flowers that are beneficial to them.

Two-tailed Swallowtail

Western Pygmy-blue

BE OUTSIDE

IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

It's the time of year to see hummingbirds, bees, butterflies and other pollinators out looking for the food they need to survive.

Inviting pollinators to your house is well worth the effort. You don't need a lot of space, even a few pots of plants can give pollinators a nice meal. Planting a garden is a great way to spend time outside and have fun!

Here are some things to consider if you want to make a pollinator garden:

- **Plant a variety of plants that bloom from early spring to late fall.** Remember, pollinators like certain flower colors and shapes, so the more variety you plant, the greater variety of pollinators you will see.

- **Native plants are the best choice.** Modern hybrid plants often are bred so their flowers do not make nectar and pollen. They look pretty to us but offer nothing to pollinators.
- **Do not use herbicides and pesticides.** These chemicals are harmful to plants, pollinators and the environment. If you feel like you must control a pest, use less-toxic natural remedies, like soapy water. Spray at night when most pollinators are not active.
- **Provide a source of water.** Some species of bees and wasps will use the mud from a puddle to make homes. Many pollinators also get minerals from mud puddles. You can also mix sea salt and water together in a shallow dish. Place a sponge in the dish. See how many pollinators land on the sponge to get the water and salt they need.
- **Put up a hummingbird feeder.** Mix 1/4 cup table sugar with 1 cup water. Never use artificial sweeteners, honey or fruit juice, or coloring. You may see more than hummingbirds visit your feeder.
- **Make a bee box** and other places for pollinators to nest and spend the winter. Drill holes about three to five inches deep in an old log or piece of lumber and put it in a sheltered place in your yard.
- **Don't forget the babies!** If you want lots of butterflies, you need plants the caterpillars eat. Milkweed is an important addition if you're seeking monarch butterflies.

Enjoy the fruits and vegetables of your efforts and help pollinators too!

Moth Photo: CC-BY Austin Reich,

Swallowtail Photo: CC-BY Luana

Pollinators Word Search

H F Q M D P V J E X P L N B B
S U L N O H A N Z O Y U E E N
D E M O B T A H L S U F C E R
Z Z M M W T H L F X I R T S F
Y S C O I E I S S B H O A D L
Z Z C U R N R L W U D L R E U
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WORDS

BATS
BEES
BEETLES
BUTTERFLIES
COLORFUL
CROPS
FLIES
FLOWERS
FOOD
FRUIT
GUIDES
HUMMINGBIRDS
MOTHS
NECTAR
ODOR
POLLEN
POLLINATION
SEEDS
SYNDROMES
ULTRAVIOLET

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue!
Send it to: **lori.wilson@idfg.idaho.gov**
or
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