Pollinator Protection

Insects, such as bees and butterflies, are the most common and abundant pollinators. They are crucial to many agricultural crops and play a role in maintaining the health and diversity of our landscape.

Pollinator decline is caused by many factors, including loss of habitat and foraging area, disease, poor nutrition, and pesticide misuse. As good stewards of the land, it is important that we actively work to reverse this trend.

Top Ways to Protect Pollinators

1. Follow product label directions and read the warnings. This includes avoiding harm to pollinators, their food and water sources, and their habitat.
2. Be aware of blooms and avoid applying pesticides (insecticides or fungicides) to crops, weeds and other vegetation that is blooming. If necessary, remove blooming weeds before application. Some pesticides that have an extended residual toxicity of less than 4 hours can be applied at night, when bees are not foraging. Be aware, however, that if applied before or during a cold night, toxicity can be extended. If followed by a day warmer than 70 degrees Fahrenheit, the incidence of bee kills greatly increases.
3. Avoid drift of an applied pesticide to adjacent areas.
4. Communicate with beekeepers. Do a search for a beekeeping association in your area.
5. Avoid applying systemic insecticides by soil drench or tree injection to plants known to attract bees. These methods may contaminate nectar and pollen for up to several years. If you must use soil drench or tree injection, do it after flower petals have fallen and use the lowest possible effective dosage to help reduce the risk to pollinators.
6. Incorporate buffers and designate natural areas for pollinators to forage and nest. The role of natural pollinators is often underestimated.
7. Use an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach.
8. If possible, leave natural areas for native pollinators to live. Often, native pollinators live in the ground or in trees.
9. Plant native flowers. Not every pollinator can get access to the nectar of every flower. Pollinators and plants have developed a relationship over time so it is important to plant flowers from which pollinators benefit.

Pollinator Protection Resources

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Center for Integrated Pest Management
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- CropLife America
- EPA advisory box for neonicatinoids

What to Look for on a Label

A product's label provides use directions, safety information, and other requirements specific to the chemical. At first glance, the label can appear overwhelming and cumbersome due to all the information included. If you know what to look for, however, labels become a lot simpler. A few things to look for include:

1. Directions for use – how much of the product to use
2. Safety information – what protective clothing is required when using
3. Environmental hazards – includes specific pollinator safety instructions (do not apply to blooms)
4. Storage and disposal information – triple-rinse and dispose according to your local solid waste authority's requirements

Label Resources

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Penn State College of Agricultural Science PDF