



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

Plant Native Plants to Support Local Environment, Wildlife

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Earth Day is April 22. Every year, people around the world observe the day by helping to care for the environment. They carry out all kinds of activities in an effort to better the planet's health.

One way to support this goal is to grow plants native to your area. This helps wildlife like birds and insects that **evolved** alongside native plants. For many of these animals, plant **pollen** is their food.

Native pollinators often cannot recognize non-native plants as food. This means they do not collect the pollen or spread plants' seeds.

Planting non-native species creates so-called "food deserts" for pollinators including bees, birds, bats, butterflies and more.

Doug Tallamy is a professor of entomology at the University of Delaware. Entomology is the study of insects. He found that non-native plant species can harm the natural food chain, which can lead to a collapse of the environment.

"Plant choice matters," he said. "The plants we choose to landscape our properties (with) should be **determined** by how much life can live there."

Humans depend strongly on insects. Without them, we would have no flowering plants, which would harm the food web that supports important animals. Birds, for example, depend on plants for food and spread their seeds while keeping the populations of harmful insects down.

Insects support plants that provide oxygen, clean our water, capture carbon and add nutrients to the soil. That builds topsoil and prevents flooding. Without insects, the biosphere – the living parts of the Earth – would **rot** because of the loss of insect decomposers. Humans simply could not survive that, Tallamy said.

In addition to providing food and **habitat** for insects and other wildlife, native plants are able to grow easily and do not require much care. That means less watering and less fertilizing. The situation is a **win-win** for gardeners and pollinators.

I'm Ashley Thompson.

Words in This Story

evolve - v. to change or develop slowly often into a better, more complex, or more advanced state : to develop by a process of evolution

pollen - n. the very fine usually yellow dust that is produced by a plant and that is carried to other plants of the same kind usually by wind or insects so that the plants can produce seeds

determine - v. to be the cause of or reason for (something)

rot - v. to slowly decay or cause (something) to decay

habitat - n. the place or type of place where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives or grows

win-win - adj. providing a good result for everyone involved
