Trees for Pollinators (Published 4/20/2024)
By Kate O'Lenic, Master Gardener

Hopefully you planted some new trees on Arbor Day. We enjoy trees for their beauty, fall color, and cool shade. We also enjoy the tasty fruit our trees provide that depend on pollinators for fruit and nut development. Pollinators need trees too. For example, trees provide pollinators with nesting and resting places, shelter, and protection from predators and severe weather. The leaves may also serve as food for butterfly and moth caterpillars. It's nature working in balance.

Certain trees are excellent sources for pollinators. For example, native maple trees, such as red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), are wonderful for pollinators, including bees, butterflies, wasps, flies, and birds. They bloom early and even better, they provide amazing fall color for all of us to enjoy.

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is another excellent resource for pollinators. It attracts butterflies, bees, wasps, flies, hummingbirds, and beetles. The beautiful pink blossoms in early spring attract loads of pollinators, it is a host plant for larva, and the pods are enjoyed by songbirds.

For something different, how about a persimmon tree (*Diospyros virginiana*). It has lovely, scented blossoms in spring and produces a sweet fruit in the fall. This tree is dioicous, meaning you'll need a male and female tree to produce blossoms and fruit.

Oak trees (pin oak (*Quercus palustris),* black oak (*Quercus velutina*), and red oak *(Quercus rubra)* are the champions of keystone plants supporting 400-500 different pollinators. "*Keystone plants are native plants critical to the food web and necessary for many wildlife species to complete their life cycle. Without keystone plants in the landscape, butterflies, native bees, and birds will not thrive. 96% of our terrestrial birds rely on insects supported by keystone plants*." (from National Wildlife Federation, Keystone Native Plants, Eastern Temperate Forests - Ecoregion 8, https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Garden-for-Wildlife/Keystone-Plants/NWF-GFW-keystone-plant-list-ecoregion-8-eastern-temperate-forests.pdf?sc_lang=en&hash=C475FADDFCC2622C7539F25935F5DAA1)

Another interesting tree is sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*). Bright yellow-green flowers appear in spring on separate male and female trees. The leaves are bright green and mitten-shaped or fork-shaped. The underside of the leaves is pale or white. Female trees produce a blue, fleshy drupe (a fleshy fruit like a plum) in a red cup attached to a red stalk. The tree puts on a great show in the fall with a yellow to orange to red leaves. All parts of the sassafras produce a scent including the young bark which releases a spicy scent when scratched. It supports a wide range of pollinators, including butterflies, bees, wasps, moths, flies, and beetles. The fruits are enjoyed by birds.

If you have room for a large tree, the tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a good choice. It attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. The showy flowers are tulip-shaped, and twigs have a sweet, spicy scent.

A great resource to learn more about these trees is North Carolina Extension Gardener Toolbox at https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/. Be sure to check details to be ensure you choose the right tree for the right place.

The tables listed below also have information about pollinators and the trees and shrubs that support them.

"Trees and Shrubs for Pollinators," https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/trees-forever-trees-and-shrubs-for-pollinators.pdf

"Native Trees and Shrubs for Pollinators,"
https://pollinators.msu.edu/sites/_pollinators/assets/File/treesshrubsposter.pdf

FREE Presentation
Dr. Doug Tallamy is the T. A. Baker Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He is a leader in native plant horticulture. He will present "Learn more about nature gardening".

May 6, 2024, 6:30pm EST

Register at:
https://tennessee.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0uc-qspz0pHdSx0-0v-Xfo3sSWPDiT7hnx

How do I ask a question?
If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.