

the Bees' Knees

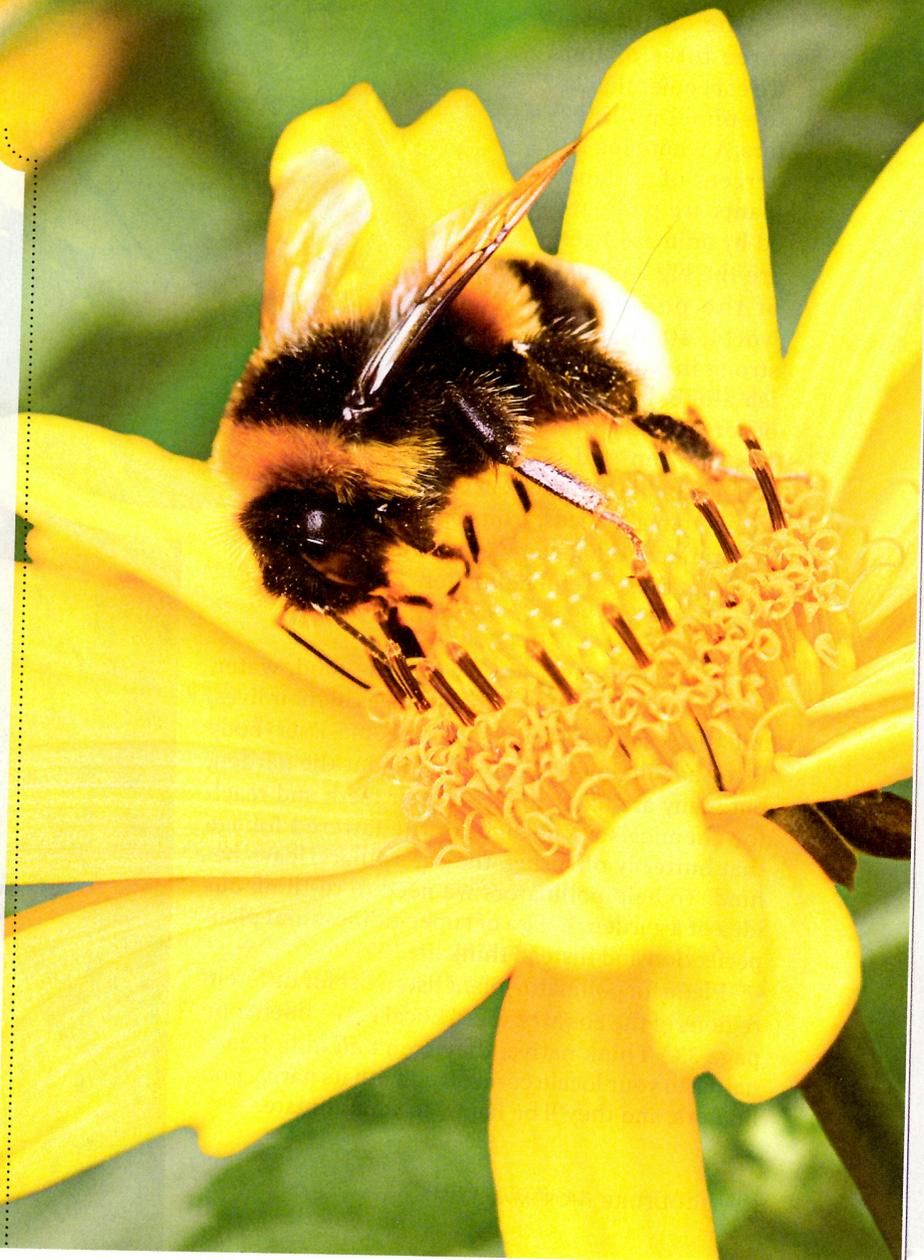
Plants and garden practices that support native pollinators

by **Paige Embry**



A red admiral butterfly and a bumblebee feed on the blooms of oxeye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*). By offering the proper flowers for adult insects—as well as foliage for their young, a safe habitat and water—you can draw important pollinators to your garden, for its benefit as well as theirs.

IT'S A TYPICAL June day in Seattle, cloudy and cool. Those fair-weather Euro-imports, the honeybees, are hiding out in their nests, but the garden isn't bereft of bees. A valiant, fuzzy bumblebee is out blundering from flower to flower, gathering pollen and nectar to take home to the babes. She lands on the end of a tomato flower, grabs on tight and starts to beat her wings—fast. Soon, a cloud of pollen puffs from the anthers. This is buzz pollination, something certain plants require and honeybees can't do. Miss Bumblebee collects her booty of pollen in storage devices on her hind legs, although some grains remain stuck to her hairy little body. These will rub off on the pistil of the next plant she visits—the first stage of plant sex, also known as pollination, that leads to the delicious fruits and vegetables we all love.





One out of every three bites of food we eat comes thanks to animal pollinators. A whopping 75 percent of all land plants are pollinated by animals. Bees are the big kahunas of the pollinating world, 4000-species strong in North America alone, but a host of other animals sip nectar, steal pollen and generally roll around in flowers, enabling plants to make seeds, fruits and new generations. What can we as gardeners do to tempt these useful pollinators into our yards?

FOOD AND WATER

All pollinators need what we need—food, water, shelter and basic safety—for all stages of their lives, and that’s a real kicker for some people. Everybody loves having butterflies flitting about the garden, but many are likely to gnash their teeth and reach for chemicals at the sight of the tattered foliage that butterfly offspring, the caterpillars, leave behind. To help pollinators we need to re-think our idea of a garden. Let go of super-tidiness and plant perfection and instead think life.

Plenty of pollinator-plant lists exist for different regions of the country. (See “Local Fare” sidebar on page 33.) Think native; they aren’t *all* dull. Plants native to your locale co-evolved with its native pollinators, and they’ll be happy in your climate.

