

Green Thumb

What's the buzz about pollinators?



It's easy to think of pollen only in terms of what it does to those suffering from seasonal allergies, but pollen is essential for plant and animal life.

The Ecological Society of America (ESA) says pollen is a plant's male sex cells that must be transferred from one flower to the stigma of the same flower or another for the plant to produce fruit and seed. Although some of this pollination occurs naturally, such as that aided by the wind or among plants that are self-pollinating, the vast majority of plants cannot move pollen without helpers or pollinators. Check out these facts about pollinators and pollination to learn why they're important to ecological health.

• Insects are the primary pollinators, although birds,

bats and other creatures also can spread pollen around. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation credit honeybees, bumblebees, butterflies, moths, wasps, flies and beetles with pollinating the most plants. However, the ESA says between 200,000 and 300,000 invertebrate species are estimated to serve globally as pollinators.

• Bees and other pollinators play critical roles in food production. The United States Department of Agriculture says more than 100 U.S.-grown crops rely on pollinators.

• About 75 percent of all flowering plants rely on animal pollinators.

• Pollinator.org says blueberries, chocolate, coffee, vanilla, almonds, pumpkins and peaches are just some of

the foods and beverages that are produced with the help of pollinators.

• Most bee species native to North America are "solitary bees." They don't live in colonies and rarely sting unless physically threatened or injured. Bees largely can be left alone to do their thing and people can comfortably cohabitate nearby.

• Honeybees have different jobs than other species. A honeybee colony is made up of one reproductive queen, sexually undeveloped female workers and male drones. Drones mate with the queen so she can lay eggs and the workers are responsible for caring for eggs, cleaning the hive and collecting nectar, pollen and other resources for the colony.

• Pollinators have been on the decline for a number of reasons. The Pollinator Partnership says threats to pollinators include pollution, pests, pathogens, changes in

land use that degrades their habitats and climate change. Honeybees, monarch butterflies and native bumblebees have all exhibited declines in recent years, according to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

• People can help protect pollinators by creating polli-

nator-friendly garden habitats with native plants best suited to local areas. Individuals also can select old fashioned varieties of flowers whenever possible, since breeding has caused some modern blooms to lose the nectar/pollen needed to feed pollinators. Also, install

houses for bats and native bees to encourage them to take up residence and avoid the use of pesticides around the landscape.

Pollinators are vital to the health of the ecosystem. Without pollinators, food supplies would dwindle and plant life would suffer.

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Cost effective curb appeal boosters

Boosting curb appeal is a common focus of sellers before listing a property. Plenty of projects can offer maximum output with minimal investment.

Refresh the front door.

Painting the front door can add brightness and improve the look of a home's entryway. Most exterior paint costs between \$30 and \$40 per gallon, so this is undeniably a budget-friendly improvement. If money allows, replacing the door altogether will generate bang for your buck.

Improve or add landscaping elements.

Landscaping should be designed to highlight the home's best features. It should look symmetrical and feel manicured. If it's not possible to plant new flowers or bushes, simply cleaning up debris and weeds and trimming existing greenery can make it feel neater and more polished.

Clean up.

Power-washing the siding, cement walkways and garage door can create

instant impact. It's amazing how much dirt and mildew can reduce the luster of a home. Cleaning off years of grime can be a fast and inexpensive refresh.

Reseal the driveway.

Make sure the driveway is clean and tidy. If it has cracks or discoloration, filling in cracks and applying a new coat of sealer will make a big difference. Homeowners can hire someone to reseal the driveway or do the work on their own.

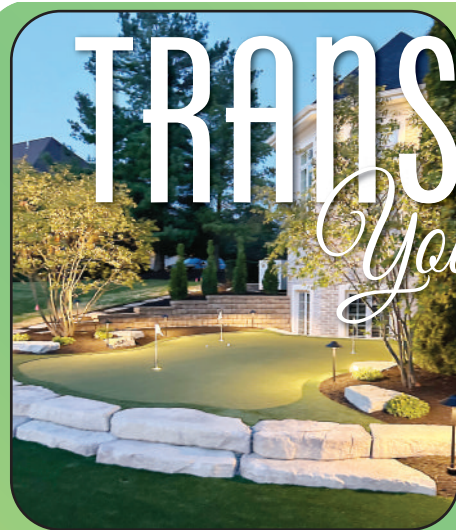
Add more lighting.

Updating front porch lights and accent lights around the property will cast a more positive glow on a home, both literally and figuratively.

Add a seating area.

If space by the front door allows, add a bench or some chairs to create a welcoming seating area. A potted plant or two nearby will help the area seem intentional.

Improving curb appeal doesn't have to cost a lot of money. A few easy touches can boost the look of any property.



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