

Pollinator-friendly plants

By Dr CHRISTOPHER TEH

Do you have a question about plants or how to maintain your garden? Send your questions to the Plant Doctor! Email your questions to lifestyle@thestar.com.my with "Plant Doctor" in the subject field. Questions may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Dear Plant Doctor,

Q What pollinator-friendly plants can I grow in my garden? What do I need to do to ensure they thrive and attract and support bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects? – *MJ*

Opting for native plant species is particularly important because they are better adapted to local conditions and are naturally more attractive to local pollinators.

One recommended plant for a pollinator-friendly garden is hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*), which is a native flower beloved by various pollinators.

Coral vine (*Antigonon leptopus*) is another excellent choice, known for its vibrant blooms that draw butterflies.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) are not only visually striking, but also rich in nectar, making them a popular choice for bees. Zinnias (*Zinnia elegans*), with their bright and varied colours, easily attract bees and butterflies alike, while marigolds (*Tagetes* spp.) not only lure pollinators but also help deter garden pests.

Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*) is a resilient plant that attracts a wide range of insects, and basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), when allowed to flower, becomes a



Hibiscus is a native flower beloved by various pollinators. – CHRIS VAN DE RIDDER/Unsplash

magnet for bees. Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) is crucial for the survival of monarch butterflies, making it a good choice in pollinator gardens.

Ixora (*Ixora coccinea*), a popular tropical shrub, is available in numerous colours and is particularly favoured by butterflies. Ulam Raja (*Cosmos caudatus*), native to South-East Asia, produces daisy-like flowers that

are highly attractive to butterflies. Mussaenda (*Mussaenda* spp.), with its array of pink, white, salmon and red flowers, is another favourite of butterfly enthusiasts.

Additionally, *Justicia aurea*, also known as Yellow Jacobinia, stands out with its bright yellow plumes, and *Rotheca myricoides*, commonly called the Blue Butterfly Bush, is aptly named for its ability to draw

butterflies. To ensure that your garden thrives, it is important to diversify your planting.

Select flowers that bloom at different times of the year, so that they provide a continuous food source for pollinators.

Avoid using chemical pesticides, as these can harm beneficial insects.

Instead, opt for organic pest management techniques or sticky traps.

Providing water sources such as shallow dishes or small ponds will also support insects that visit your garden.

Additionally, leaving some areas of the garden undisturbed will create nesting sites for bees and other beneficial insects.

You may also consider adding bee hotels or leaving bare patches of soil for ground-nesting bees.

Finally, enrich your soil with organic fertilisers and compost to promote healthy plant growth without negatively impacting the pollinators.

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