

Putting Your Garden to Bed the Pollinator-Friendly Way

Is the task of “garden clean-up” on your to-do list this fall? How would you like to shorten that list and do something for nature at the same time?

Read on for some tips!

Leave the Leaves

People think of fall as a time of much leaf-raking and curb-side disposal in numerous tall brown bags. For pollinator-friendly gardens, the opposite can be true: you can leave the leaves where they fall or rake them onto your flower or garden beds. Not only do the leaves act as mulch and provide nutrients as they decompose, but they provide an important overwintering site for beneficial insects, including butterflies like the Mourning Cloak (right), the Eastern Comma, the Question Mark, and the Atlantis Fritillary (among others!).



Broken Branches?

Did you have any branches come down in the recent high winds? By placing a few branches along your property line, they can quietly decompose while providing opportunities for wildlife to overwinter or make their homes. For instance, mason and leaf-cutting bees make their homes in beetle tunnels, while the shiny green *Augochlora* bees nest in rotting logs. Some butterflies, like swallowtails (far right), also attach their overwintering chrysalis' to stems.



Skip the Last Mow or Mow it High

As fall progresses, grass stops growing, so you may be able to just skip that last mow. Taller grass is healthier for your lawn, as the grass can produce deeper roots and withstand heat stresses better than when it is cut short. As well, allowing the cut grass or “thatch” to remain on the lawn conserves moisture, keeps the weeds down, and provides some protection to insects. This means no raking and less grass-cutting per season! When you do cut the grass, ensure your lawnmower cuts high, leaving at least 3 ½ inches of grass (it’s not a golf course!). Leave a patch of grass long and uncut for bumblebees to nest in.



Seeds and Stems for the Birds and Bees

In order to create a garden that feeds pollinators from spring to fall, and birds from the fall through the winter, consider planting flowers like Asters, Black-Eyed Susans, Coneflowers, Coreopsis, Goldenrods, Joe-Pye Weeds and Sedums, and shrubs like Dogwoods, Elderberries, and Serviceberries. Their flowers provide pollen and nectar to pollinators, and then after pollination, produce seeds and fruit that feed many song birds such as Cardinals, Chickadees, Goldfinches, Indigo Buntings, Nuthatches, Sparrows, Towhees, Pine Siskins, Yellow-Rumped Warblers, Wrens, Titmice and Juncos. As an added bonus, many of these hollow or pithy-stemmed plants also provide nesting sites for the bees in the spring. So do not “clean up your garden” by cutting these plants down; if you must cut them, do so in the spring after the seeds have been eaten, and leave at least the bottom 8 inches in place.



Composting Black Gold

If you have a composter, now is a good time to mix it up, and to add a layer of leaves to help supplement that nutrient rich mix. Remember, you can still add to your composter throughout the fall and winter with more leaves (why not make a pile next to the composter?), fruit and vegetable waste. Next spring, you can use the resulting “black gold” to feed your garden.



For more tips on how you can garden for pollinators, visit www.pollinationguelph.ca.