

Author's Personal Notes on Pollinator Gardening

"If half of American lawns were replaced with native plants, we could create the equivalent of a 20 million acre national park, nine times bigger than Yellowstone, or 100 times bigger than Shenandoah National Park."

Douglas Tallamy

I started my personal pollinator garden over a decade ago (at about the same time I started working with my students to create an outdoor classroom). I've added new plants almost every year. My dream yard would have looked like a miniature prairie meadow. Today it is wild and many of my beloved plants are trying to take over territory that was not meant to be theirs. Fortunately for me, I have friends and relatives who will happily help dig up and provide a new home for the wandering plants.

I'm including notes on my plants and my experience with them because much of the information I'm including here is not easily found or readily understood on the usual wildflower websites. Basically, I wish someone had done this for me.

*"Restrict turf to wide paths that guide pedestrians through your landscape, that draw the eye to a featured aspect of your design, or that define beds, tree groves, or various hardscapes as being purposeful and cared for. In their 2015 book, *Planting in a Post-Wild World*, Thomas Rainer and Claudia West suggest that we think of lawn as an area rug, not wall-to-wall carpeting. Superb advice!"*

— Douglas W. Tallamy, *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard*

This is something I am now incorporating in my native garden. It helps me weed around my plants and gives the garden a more civilized look, something that helps to balance the wild look of it and is more palatable to some who view it. Although most turf must be mowed, it provides cooler and softer access for caterpillars that wish to travel between beds when looking for a place to make the transition to a chrysalis. There are some great alternatives to the traditional grass, too, that require little or no mowing.

Vines get their own section. My experience with native vines is that they are aggressive growers. In my personal garden they constantly need to be removed from areas of my yard that are not where I want them. However I am very happy to have 3 of them. They are a magnet for pollinators, including birds. These are the 4 vines in my yard (the last vine is best avoided).

✓ **Pasiflora incarnata** or passionvine: This vine is the host plant for 3 butterflies, the Gulf Fritillary, Variegated Fritillary, and Mexican Fritillary. It's an Oklahoma native plant. Its flowers are exotic and produce a tasty fruit that seems to require a mild frost to ripen. The vine spreads easily from spreading roots. Fortunately my lawn is surrounded on 2 sides by roads and the other 2 by large driveways. It has easily spread under sidewalks and, in spite of my efforts, is moving from the backyard to the front yard. But I love this plant and will put up with its bad behavior and keep pulling up the unwanted new growth. I have provided my vines with dead branches to climb along my fence line. This vine will climb any available structure or plant. It does not, however, kill the plant it climbs.

https://www.fnps.org/assets/pdf/pubs/passiflora_incarnata_purplepassionflower_2-1.pdf

✓ **Campsis radicans** or trumpetvine: This plant was well-established in my yard when I moved in. It's a magnet for bees and hummingbirds as well as the downy woodpecker and several different finches. The larger birds extract the nectar by pecking holes in the base of the flower. This vine, like passionvine, spreads quickly and easily but, in my experience, does not tend to climb trees and other plants.



- ✓ Lonicera sempervirens or coral honeysuckle: This plant is a new addition to my garden. It is valued for its nectar by the same group of animals as the trumpetvine. It is also the host plant for the Snowberry Clearwing Moth, which behaves much like a hummingbird, and the Spring Azure butterfly.
- ✓ Clematis terniflora or sweet autumn clematis: This vine is a highly invasive, non-native species and will climb, choke out, and kill any plant it grows on if left unchecked. It has seeds that are spread by the wind like dandelion seeds, which is how it became an unwelcome part of my garden. It is extremely hard to kill due to its deep and spreading roots. I have seen no pollinators on its flowers. Sweet autumn clematis has flowers that look like those of native woodbine, however the leaves of the native plant are serrated whereas the non-native plant has smooth leaves.

"Knowledge generates interest, and interest generates compassion."

— Douglas W. Tallamy, Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens

I am adding educational signs to my personal garden. My garden is visible to the public as I live on a corner and have a picket fence. Comments on my garden by neighbors and those walking the neighborhood have been positive overall. However, I recently got cited by the city for having a yard that was too wild (not their wording) and in need of clearing. My habit is to leave the winter-dead plants as they serve as a safe haven for the insects that overwinter in the garden and the food for birds. Because of the citation, I had to cut most of this back. I am now hoping that my educational signs and new turf pathways will allow those who only see the "ugly", too-tall, dead plants to understand how this is intentional and part of the natural cycle for our native plants and animals.

