

WHERE DID ALL THE FLOWERS, ER, INSECTS GO?

By Maritta Perry Grau, Master Gardener

All through spring, summer, and early fall we've been telling you ways to attract pollinators to your yard. As they flit, fly, and crawl among the blossoms of your flowers, vegetables, trees, and shrubs, they distribute pollen and increase the produce. But now the weather's getting colder and the pollinators are fewer and fewer. Perhaps instead of asking "Where have all the flowers gone," we should ask, "Where have all the pollinators gone?"

Ants, butterflies, moths, bees, beetles, birds, and so many other species within those families. What happens to them? Where do they go in the winter?

Birds -- If you host a bird feeder, you are probably seeing a change already in your visitors. Gone are the gold finches, although the year-round purple house finches are still here. Most common are the Northern Cardinal (probably about 51 percent of the birds we see), white-throated sparrow (43 percent); dark-eyed junco (40 percent); Carolina chickadee (40 percent); Carolina wren (38 percent); tufted titmouse (35 percent); blue jay (35 percent); and the downy woodpecker (34 percent). We even find quite a few robins in trees and bushes throughout the winter, although they are not interested in the spoils of the bird feeder.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds are true "snowbirds," generally flying to Mexico and Central America for the winter. As the abundance of insects starts to dwindle with cold temperatures, they begin to leave Maryland. Most sites recommend taking hummingbird feeders down for the winter two weeks after you see the last hummingbird. Males usually begin to migrate first, with females and younger birds spending more time near the nest before they leave. As a rule of thumb, clean and put feeders back up when the earliest daffodils begin to bloom. The hummingbirds usually return to Maryland in early April.

Insect pollinators -- Some species of insects die after laying eggs of future progeny that will emerge next spring. Some spin cocoons. Some fly to warmer climes. Others hibernate—in the ground, in tree hollows, under garden debris, in hollow stalks.

In Maryland, our most important group of pollinators, with more than 400 species, is the bee. Not too far behind are our butterflies, about 150 species in Maryland, according to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (<https://dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife/Pages/habitat/wabees.aspx>).

*According to the Maryland DNR, "Bees come in all colors, shapes and sizes, [ranging] from large carpenter bees to the tiny *Perdita minima*. Different bee species pollinate different plants, so we need a variety of bees for all our gardens. Some are solitary, some are colonial, building their "city" around a queen.*

Maryland's 400+ species of bees belong to five common families. Most spend their winters in their nests.

- *Apidae (honey bees, bumble bees, and allies). Bumble bees nest in the ground or in boxes on the ground. Carpenter bees excavate holes in wood.*

- *Halictidae* (sweat bees). This family has some very colorful species. Like lots of Maryland's native bees, these sweat bees are solitary and nest underground in bare soil exposed to the sun. Others, however, nest in rotting wood or even lay their eggs in other bees' nests.
- *Adrenidae* (miner bees). Like so many others, miner bees nest in the ground. Although they are solitary, many will nest in the same general area. Each hole belongs a single female. On the other hand, yellow jackets often have "one main entrance that serves as a super highway for multiple wasps."
- *Megachilidae* (leaf-cutter bees, mason bees and allies), and *Colletidae* (plasterer bees). This website recommends that we leave an area of bare soil, brush piles, old stumps, dead flower stalks, etc., for various bees' winter nesting sites.

Butterflies, moths, and other insects -- Most insects in Maryland hibernate in one life stage or another. They may shelter in those brush piles we mentioned above, laying eggs in the hollow stalks of dead plants, in stumps or dead trees, or metamorphosing into caterpillar, hatching and burrowing into the soil near their respective host plants. Some butterflies and moths migrate, just as do the Maryland hummingbirds and some other birds. The Citizen Science Program, Monarch Watch, has been going for more than 20 years. Citizen scientists have been tagging butterflies, and learning "more about the monarch's migration pathways [and] populations." Recently, a monarch butterfly that had been tagged at Gunpowder Falls State Park during the previous fall...was recovered on top of Sierra Chincua [more than] 2,000 miles away from Maryland." There, like salmon swimming upstream, millions of monarchs go back to their origins.

You should know that Frederick County Master Gardener seminars and other activities—except those held outdoors or at locations other than the Extension Office—are still cancelled until further notice. In the meantime, you can find gardening information and advice online at: University of MD Extension Home & Garden Information Center,

<https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmental-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center>; Frederick County Master Gardeners Publications, <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>; Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>; or call us with gardening questions at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).



Bees dig solitary burrows in the soil. Some, such as miner bees, while still solitary, make burrows near to other bees. Source: <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2019/05/should-i-be-concerned-about-ground-nesting-bees-my-yard>

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596. Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>

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