

# Welcoming Wildlife

**This garden is designed to be welcoming—not only to humans, but also to wildlife.**

Insects and other critters help our gardens thrive. Pollinators, such as bees and butterflies, pollinate our plants, providing us with flowers and food. Beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, eat harmful pests, including aphids. Other insects break down organic materials, such as leaves, improving the fertility of our soil. Insects are also an essential food source for songbirds and other creatures that bring our gardens to life.

*Right:* The wood thrush is Washington, DC's official bird. These songbirds were once plentiful in our area, but their numbers are declining due to climate change and habitat loss.

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## NATURAL IS BEAUTIFUL

Native plants add a beautiful tapestry of biodiversity to our gardens. Letting plant stems and seed heads stand over the winter and leaving leaves on the ground helps fertilize the soil and provides local wildlife with important sources of food and shelter.



*Right:* There are nearly 4,000 native bee species in North America, most of which are solitary and stingless. Native bees pollinate many native plants.

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*Far right:* Like monarch caterpillars, large milkweed bugs feed on toxic milkweed plants (*Asclepias*), which discourages predators from eating them. Their orange and black colors reinforce the “Stay Away!” message.

*Right:* Yellow garden spiders spin their webs in sunny, still areas of the garden. A thick silk strand that zigzags down the center of the web helps camouflage the spider and warns birds of their web.

## INVITE WILDLIFE INTO YOUR GARDEN

Native creatures love native plants. Try growing native plants in your garden and see who comes to visit.



*Background illustration:* Native plants, such as blazing star (*Liatris spicata*), are key to creating wildlife-friendly gardens.

*“The challenge is to be ever respectful to all native wildlife and plants while incorporating our lives into theirs, not the reverse.”*

—Derek Thomas, Anacostia Community Museum Garden Facilitator

## WHY NATIVE PLANTS?

Native plants and animals coevolved with each other and depend on one another.

Growing native plants helps restore native habitats that are threatened by urban development and invasive species.

Native plants are also well adapted to the soil, average rainfall, and climate of our region.

*Left:* Smithsonian Gardens Entomologist and Plant Health Specialist Dr. Holly Walker talks to kids about monarch butterflies and caterpillars and how they depend on milkweed (*Asclepias*).

