

## Creating a pollinator habitat garden.

A pollinator habitat garden is a place that can provide food, shelter, and nesting space for insect pollinators, such as native bees, as well as increasing the biodiversity of your garden.

### **Food**

A pollinator habitat garden is more than just flower beds. By providing an assortment of plants, which flower throughout the year, you are providing a consistent food supply which will encourage pollinating insects and birds to stay, feed, drink, shelter and even reproduce. It is recommended that you plant swathes or large patches of flowers, rather than scattering them randomly through the garden. By planting flowering food-crops in large patches, you encourage specialist pollinators such as bees to forage within these patches, cross pollinating the plants as they move efficiently from flower to flower.

### **Shelter**

The next thing you need to do is provide potential shelter. You can include hollow logs, pieces of thick bark and crowds of rocks which will provide shelter and nesting substrate for a variety of pollinators. Resin bees, leafcutter bees and solitary wasps will nest in large drilled holes in wood, which mimic the natural cavities produced by wood-boring insects. Hollow or pithy stems can be collected and bundled up when plants are pruned. These will attract reed bees and masked bees as well as small solitary wasps and ants. By providing small cavities in rockeries or with layers of rolled bark, you will provide shelter for ladybeetles, resin bees and other pollinators.

In Australia, gardeners are encouraged to mulch their plants, to maintain soil moisture. However, some of our pollinators, such as solitary bees and wasps, nest in the ground and find it hard to dig through the thick layers of mulch. So leave an area of bare ground, at

least a metre square, to encourage ground-nesting bees into your garden.

### **Water**

Water is necessary for honey bees and birds so include a shallow bird bath, with a large rock or scattering of pebbles, to reduce the chances of insects drowning. A bowl filled with wet mud will provide minerals and water for some butterfly species and rocks provide insects with a warm place to bask.

### **Maintenance**

Maintenance of your habitat garden is important if the plants and the pollinators are to thrive. Water deeply and regularly to ensure flowers produce plenty of nectar and pollen. Don't use insecticides. If a plant is infested with many pests, it may need feeding, pruning or replacing. A healthy garden will not only encourage pollinators, it will encourage wasps, shield bugs, spiders, dragonflies, robber flies, hover flies, lacewings and other natural pest-predators. Keep the water and mud bowls topped up and place a seat out in the garden so you can sit, observe and enjoy your wonderful pollinator habitat garden.

### **Some suggested plants:**

Bees and other pollinators are attracted to many flowers. Some vegetable flowers are great pollinator food, so select a few to 'sacrifice' and let them bolt to flower. Exotics such as salvia, hebe, lavender are great planted in swathes and herb gardens provide a variety of flowers. Speak with your local nursery to find out what natives do well in your area.