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for the natural
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movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
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INCREASE YIELDS in your vegetable and berry garden BY GOING NATIVE

By Candy Sarikonda

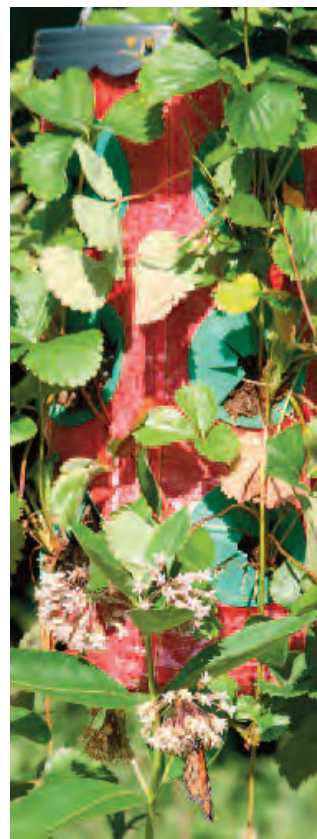
Did you know that you can increase yields of your favorite fruits and vegetables by attracting native pollinators? If you grow tomatoes, peppers, raspberries, squash, watermelons, blueberries, pumpkins, eggplant and so on, then it is time for you to consider adding milkweed and other native nectar plants to your vegetable and fruit gardens.

Years ago, I decided to plant berry bushes in my home garden, to encourage better eating habits in my children. I could buy a package of raspberries at the grocery store, but nothing tastes better than a freshpicked raspberry! My children delighted in hunting and picking our berries, and very quickly they suggested we have a vegetable garden too. But alas, I only had full sun in my front yard, and I didn't think the neighbors would be too thrilled to see a vegetable garden on my front lawn. Truthfully, I wasn't crazy about the idea either. It sounded boring without flowers. Then a light bulb went on—why not plant the vegetables in my flower beds?

We mixed in bell peppers, cherry tomatoes, jalapeno peppers, watermelon, pumpkins, blueberries and three varieties of raspberries amongst the flowers in our front yard garden. I enjoyed looking at pretty flowers next to the veggies, as the kids harvested our crop. We had a good crop of tomatoes and raspberries, even when friends did not. I wasn't sure why, but I was thankful for our bounty--the kids were eating healthy food and having fun at the same time.

I planted black raspberries in another flower bed. I noticed a common milkweed plant had sprouted up in this bed. I had not planted it there—it "volunteered" itself, probably as a seed from my butterfly garden on the other side of my yard.

The next year I had a few more popping up and blooming in that bed. Gorgeous in bloom, the aroma was intense. Loads of bees were visiting. My raspberry crop was the best ever. The kids



Monarch on common
milkweed next to strawberry
planter hanging basket



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and I shared berries with the neighbors, plenty for all. When New England asters and hoary vervain popped up in the same bed, I allowed them to stay too.

A fellow berry grower remarked on my yields. How was it that I had such huge fruit and loads of berries, and he didn't? He insisted I MUST be using some fancy fertilizer, or doing something I wasn't telling him about. No, I insisted. Just compost and mulch, and no pesticides. My usual treatment. He left, and I looked over the crop. Bees were visiting the adjacent native wildflowers, furiously gathering nectar and pollen. Then it hit me—my wildflowers were attracting the bees! And the bees were responsible for my wonderful crop!

Since then, I have learned a great deal about my native bees. They are more efficient pollinators of our native crops than honeybees. And while both are valuable pollinators, I have come to really enjoy the

many species of native bees that call my garden home. No longer fearful of them, I truly enjoy watching them at work. They have become my constant companions in the garden. I am thankful for the bounty they provide.

If you would like to learn more about our native bees, see the booklet by Beatriz Moisset and Stephen Buchmann entitled, "Bee Basics: An Introduction to Our Native Bees" at <http://www.pollinator.org/PDFs/BeeBasicsBook.pdf> The pdf is free. Also, view Marla Spivak's TED talk at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dY7iATJVCso> to learn more about colony collapse disorder and the plight of our non-native honeybees and our native bees. And finally, to see an example of how growing native plants can help farmers get higher crop yields, see <http://mosesorganic.org/farming/farming-topics/field-crops/farmcouple-takes-pollinator-conservation-to-higher-level/>