

A Home for Native Pollinators

You can attract many types of beneficial insects to your home garden or flower beds by providing “insect hotels” or locations where they can nest. Ladybird beetles, beetles, centipedes, millipedes, harvestmen and the harmless native mason bees are some of the pollinators that may take up residence in the artful homes you create. Mason bees are not aggressive and will only sting as a last resort (their venom is mild) so watch your visitors and don’t touch.

Don’t forget to send us a photograph of your completed insect hotel, including what you decide to name it.

Activity Supplies

- Frame
- Filler materials, such as reed stems, sections of bamboo, bark, tufts of grasses, leaves, bundles of sticks, stems of hollow plants, such as roses or elderberries or blackberries, blocks of wood with pre-drilled holes, pinecones, curls of cardboard, etc.
- Optional: twine or string; glue

Activity Instructions

1. Obtain a frame. We have provided a frame for you, but an adult can help you make your own using scrapes of lumber. Use your imagination, size and shape do not matter.
2. Collect materials for your insect hotel. We’ve provided you some samples to get you started—bamboo, a pinecone and a block of wood. Collect sticks from around your yard, cut them to length to fit in the frame, and tie them with a piece of string or twine to help hold them together. Look for other natural materials (see list above) to add to the hotel. Tear the paper off one side of a strip of cardboard and roll it into a tube. Pack the frame full until everything stays in place or add a few drops of glue to help hold it together. Leave some small crevices or cracks for the insects to occupy. As these natural materials and paper products decay it is easy to add more natural materials.
3. An option for younger children is to fill a 3- to 4-inch segment of paper tube with similarly sized paper straws, wrap a piece of twine around it and tie it onto a tree branch. This is another environmentally friendly activity as the paper tube and straws will degrade, unlike plastic materials.
4. What would you name this insect hotel?



Essential Questions

1. Who are the pollinators (insects, bats, some birds, some small mammals)?
2. Why are pollinators important (they bring us one out of every three bites of food we eat)?
3. Why is the status of pollinators changing (habitat loss, pollution, misuse of pesticides, disease, climate change)?

Supporting Information

Pollinator Partnership www.pollinator.org

U.S. Forest Service www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service <https://www.fws.gov/pollinators>

Illinois Green Industry Association gardenillinois.com

Outdoor activities to correlate with project

1. What is the name of your insect hotel?
2. Place your insect hotel in your yard to attract beneficial insects. A good location is 6 to 7 feet off the ground and preferably in a location to protect the occupants from the weather, such as under an eave.
3. What other types of insect hotels can you develop? Try stacking some old bricks, rocks, broken tiles or small logs in a corner of the garden and see what types of insects start living there.
4. Many species of native bees are solitary and nest in the ground rather than in a hive. In your garden, create a small, undisturbed patch of bare or sparsely vegetated ground for these insects. Look for the holes they create as nest sites.
5. Native insects are attracted to native plants. What types of native plants would grow well in your garden?

Follow up questions

1. Sit and watch your insect hotel. Do any insects enter or leave? Can you tell what types of insects are attracted to the hotel? Which of the materials in your hotel seem to be the most popular? If you change materials does it attract other type of insects? Do the types of insects using the hotel change from spring to summer to fall?
2. While observing the hotel do you see anything else visiting it? Does the hotel attract any insect-eating birds (discussion of the food chain)?
3. If you can, install several different hotels and observe differences between the insects visiting each one. Do they prefer hotels in the shade or sun? Does it matter if the hotel is attached to the side of the house or on a tree or fence post? Does it matter if the hotel faces north, south, east or west?

Journal Prompts for Insect Hotels

Draw a picture of your insect hotel and label the types of materials you used to create it. Later, as you see insects using it, make a notation of what materials they seem to prefer.

Describe or draw the insects you see around your insect hotel.

Describe or draw the plants your insect hotel inhabitants visit.

If you have several insect hotels in your yard, create a chart showing how many insects you observe on each one and record your ideas on why some locations seem to be preferred over others.