

## Seasonal Tip

# Native plants improve vegetable production in home gardens

One can improve productivity in his home vegetable garden by including native flowers to attract pollinators. Add some native forbs either along the edges or interspersed with the vegetables, whatever suits your artistic fancy.

Providing blue flowers is especially beneficial since bees see and respond to blue better than to any other color. (They can't see red at all.) By including beebalm (*Monarda fistulosa*), great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*), and purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), one can attract beneficial pollinators and increase vegetable yields dramatically. Of course, other native forbs will bring the pollinators as well.

If one grows tomatoes, he should try to attract bumblebees (which love the above-mentioned flowers). Bumblebees are by far the best pollinators for tomatoes. Unlike other bees, they are able to disconnect their flight muscles from their wings and quiver the muscles forcefully to produce “buzz pollination” in which they cover their bodies with more pollen than with other forms of pollination. Thus they transport large amounts of pollen to the next flower. This is the most efficient means of pollinating tomatoes. The fruit will be bigger and more profuse if bumblebees are present.

It is important that one not attract pollinators and then use pesticides. Only organic vegetable gardeners should strive to attract bees to their gardens. Please give it a try and notice what a fine harvest you have. Additionally, you will have the most beautiful vegetable garden in the neighborhood!

—Meredith Tucker