

Late Summer is the time to begin preparing our gardens for the cold, dark seasons that are North American Autumn and Winter. With the dwindling populations of native pollinators, we have made a checklist of things to prepare for this changing of seasons which will help keep our insect populations safe.

So this year, why not forego the air of cleanliness for one of habitat creation and preservation?

According to Deborah Landau, a conservation ecologist with the Maryland/D.C. chapter of the Nature Conservancy, leaving structures in place will go a long way in sustaining local insect populations. Such structures include, "standing stalks of dead plants, especially under flower heads, where butterflies seek shelter. It also includes layers of leaf litter that collect to protect larvae, egg masses, hibernating wild bees, dormant spiders and many other beneficial insects."

Interestingly, stems of ornamental grasses and raspberry canes provide homes for increasingly rare cavity-nesting bees, something

we can all agree merits protection. We rely on their free services, since 75% of our food crops depend, to some extent on pollination.

The following is a checklist of things you can do to prepare:

- Give your yard at least one last soaking before reeling up the hoses for winter.
- Plant a cover crop and add new perennials including bulbs, trees and shrubs at a time when fall moisture can help establish their root systems.
- Remove ailing plants to help with disease control during the upcoming planting season. (Our wild mallows are suffering from a severe rust infection, and we will be cutting them right to the roots.)
- Don't disturb bare soil where many wild bee species, including bumblebees, overwinter in small nests. This means that you should delay any tilling. (Let earthworms do the work for you!)
- Put off pulling up your summer annuals and chrysanthemums until spring. They'll trap whatever leaves blow by, creating their own enriching mulch while shielding insects.

(From <https://tinyurl.com/yy2p58m9>)

Finally, if you are concerned about what your neighbours might think about your "untidy" yard, consider only cleaning your front garden beds. In the end, every little bit of habitat creation helps!

To learn more about the importance of pollinators, visit – tinyurl.com/y5c2bv83

