



Fall Garden Tasks That Help Pollinators

Simple efforts that have a big impact

By Suzanne Bontempo of [Plant Harmony](#)

As we transition our gardens into the fall season, there are two tasks that will save us time while helping our pollinators. The first thing to consider is to leave those fallen leaves. As the hues of fall transition our bountiful summer gardens towards the quiet of the winter, we are often faced with hours of raking those leaves that have dropped from our deciduous trees and shrubs. Well guess what? When we put down the rake and leave those leaves, we invite a natural part of our garden's ecosystem to support the many invertebrates that would like to overwinter right where they just enjoyed their summer, in your garden.

And who might these be? Many of the beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, lacewings, soldier beetles, fireflies, and caterpillars, will spend their winter dormancy deep in the leaves, using them as shelter from predators and the winter elements. Swallowtail butterfly and luna moth chrysalides resemble dried leaves and will hide in the duff throughout the winter months. Many native bees nest in cavities underground; a thick layer of leaves insulates and protects their nests from the cold winter months. Those fallen leaves provide so many benefits. Too many leaves? Move them to garden beds and other areas to protect the soil over the winter months as well as to provide cover for our many invertebrates.



Shasta daisy stalks cut 18" tall for native bees to use as nests

The second task when cleaning up perennials in preparation for winter is to leave the seedheads and flower stalks intact. Let me share that as a professional gardener, this new habit took me years to achieve as I was trained to cut the flower stalks down to create a cleaner look for my clients. I've since learned not to trim these perennials until early spring so that songbirds and other wildlife will benefit from the extra nutrition available from these seeds.

In early spring it is suggested to cut the stems of spent flowers at varying lengths, around 10"- 20" tall, so that the tunnel dwelling native bees can have safe places to nest. Many

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Fallen oak leaves



solitary bees, such as mason bees, lay their eggs and nest in the hollow stems of plants. Flower stalks from Shasta daisies, sedum 'Autumn Joy', echinacea, asters, sunflowers, and others have hollow stems that are perfectly inviting for native tunnel nesters. New flower stalks will grow, disguising the older stalks to decompose on their own. If you need to cut the stems, leave them on the ground for our stem dwellers. The flower stalks will still provide a welcome place for these pollinators to nest.