

# Portable Plants for Pollinators

## Contributing to the Protection and Proliferation of Pollinators on My Patio

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Before describing my own “how to” pattern of providing for pollinators, I need to tell you that until recent years, I never used the word “pollinator”. For the sake of full disclosure, I confess that I have squished my fair share of caterpillars who were eating my plants. My thoughts: “EW! Get out of here you nasty things! These plants are MINE.” I **still** feel remorse. Really connecting the dots between the services that pollinators provide and the fruits and vegetables that I eat is the lesson that changed my world and view of growing plants.

Can you remember the first time you appreciated a plant? Was it the color, the shape, the texture, the fragrance, the use? It is my guess that this first experience is what contributed most strongly to your current pursuit in the garden. For me, I fell in love with the roses my grandmother lovingly tended in her backyard in Los Angeles. There isn't much rainfall in Southern California, and I can recall spending summers there and watching my grandmother rise before she left for work to perform the process of locating and relocating her garden hose, so all her roses were well hydrated before the brutal sun turned the ground to dust by day's end. For Pete's sake, she set the timer! It was in that very garden that I learned that roses had names, glorious shades of bloom, and even more glorious fragrance. They brought joy.

Throughout my lifetime, I've worked in gardens in my family's community plots on military posts, in the ground in my own yards as a military wife, and in pots where we had no permission to dig in the dirt. The latter is the circumstance for my current gardening, and I'll tell you it is a far easier task to work with potted soil than to till or hoe a half-acre! So, let's connect the fantasy of creating a pollinator haven to the reality of availability.

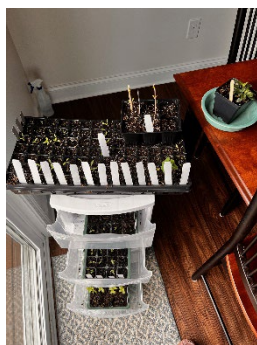
I believe that first identifying what's possible prevents the fantasy from driving us to do things that we haven't planned well, resulting in frustration and abandonment of the project altogether. Knowing I had limited space didn't limit my imagination. I used my knowledge to ignite my pursuit upon which I could build and expand as seasons went on. My first native host plant (I know, a double gold star!) acquisition was purely selfish and accidental. *Passiflora*, passion vine, was new and exciting to me because it is so unique. There was one on the edge of a construction site on my walking route which I rescued and planted in a pot on the back deck of my townhome. I confess that I selfishly just wanted to grow this plant because I don't see them often, and I was thrilled at the prospect of having

one on my deck. Sadly, my ignorance did not protect the sweet little caterpillar (gulf fritillary) which did not make it to the new location, seen then as an unwelcome passenger. I promise, better choices were ahead for me.

That same season, my sweet friend, CCB, taught me about host plant relationships with insects. Better still, she explained to me that my new pride and joy (who knew it would thrive in a pot?), rescued from a sidewalk edge, was the only food source for the gulf fritillary butterfly larvae. Are you kidding me right now?! In that moment, I turned from flower glutton to Butterfly Protector! What a revelation to learn that plants were created to feed insects. Not only that, but they rely on the successful protection and propagation of those plants to survive. The next season, I had my first monarch egg to protect (*Asclepias tuberosa* host plant), which was the best Easter egg given to me by CCB. What about *Passiflora*, you ask? As with lots of perennials, bigger plants eventually need upsized pots, and maybe even dividing. Here's my evolution:



Combined are seasons 1 and 2, left to right: Prized *Passiflora*, monarch instar, native plants (and herbs and veggies) in free pots from the discard pile at the garden store. That year, I got my garden “on the map” with Doug Tallamy’s Homegrown National Park.



No one looks good in winter, right?! Leave the winter plants (snipped stem tops for pollinator nesting) outdoors against the building (in the shed or garage for super cold climates). Propagating in portable greenhouse is next (use saved seeds from your garden last year). The right two show my 4<sup>th</sup> season’s winter clean-up and some early growth! I’ve learned so much along the way and you can find similar resources and encouragement in your area as well. Starting small, using free resources, and looking for more information as

time permitted helped me grow my knowledge and improve results in our very small areas. Try getting free information through your local Ag Extension Office (through your land grant university), Native Plant Society, and online courses. Try [Adult Programs - UGA State Botanical Garden](#) for inspiration. For fun and encouragement, look at this source (in my area) [North Georgia Native Plant Nursery - Home \(northgeorgianatives.com\)](#). Just start with one and see what happens; the pollinators will love you.