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For Immediate Release

This Thanksgiving, Why Not Thank a Pollinator?

Greenwood, SC—When we gather around the Thanksgiving table this year, perhaps we can feature a vase of colorful flowers as the centerpiece rather than a turkey, in honor of the hardworking pollinators that helped most of the food items we enjoy grow and fruit. To us, flowers represent sheer beauty, but to pollinators, they represent food—pollen and nectar.

One in every three bites of food we eat is courtesy of insect pollination and that food contains major proportions of essential micronutrients like Vitamin A & C, iron, zinc, folate, amino acids, and antioxidants. Even some of the plants that cows eat (alfalfa and clover) to make milk, cheese, butter, ice cream, and beef, depend on pollinators.

In addition to the well-known honeybee brought to America by European settlers in the 1600s, pollinators include her lesser-known hardworking native

cousins, the bumble, orchard, squash and other bees, as well as moths, beetles, birds, butterflies, bats, and hoverflies.

All pollinators travel from flower to flower during sunny days that are warm enough for flight, visiting as many as 1000 flowers per day, gathering nectar and spreading pollen along the way, but the honeybee is the only bee to convert the nectar to honey for overwintering.

Flowers evolved nectar as pollinator bait to do what most plants cannot do for themselves—move the pollen (the male part of the plant) to the plants' female parts to make seeds. Fruits and nuts are welcome bonuses.

We have about 3600 species of native wild bees in North America, but that number is declining due to pesticide exposure, loss of pollinator habitat, poor nutrition and disease. Indeed, the formerly common rusty-patched bumble bee was added to the Endangered Species List earlier this year. America's honeybee colonies also continue to struggle, dying at an average rate of 36 percent per year since 2007.

Pollinators depend on flowers with nectar; without them, many species starve. Moreover, without the pollinators, 90 percent of all species of wild plants and trees would eventually become extinct.

According to the Xerces Society Guide, *"Attracting Native Pollinators,"* "In China's Sichuan Province, one of the largest apple producing regions in the world, farmers perch on ladders in mountainside orchards to pollinate blossoms by hand. The farmers have adopted this practice because wild bees are now absent in their area, and honey beekeepers refuse to bring in their hives due to excessive pesticide use in the orchards."

When we take care of the pollinators by planting the native flowering plants they co-adapted with over millions of years, and by using insecticides, fungicides and herbicides only when there is no alternative, not only are we ensuring food supplies for man and animal, we are also encouraging beneficial insects that prey on true crop pests, like aphids. All of the fragrant, colorful flowers aren't so bad either.

So, as you scoot that cranberry sauce onto your bite of turkey, thank our native bees. And when you savor that pumpkin pie, thank a squash bee. If it's served a la mode, thank a leafcutter bee for pollinating the dairy cows' alfalfa. If you chase it with a cup of coffee, thank a stingless bee or fly. You might even consider capping off the evening with a mead toast to our little striped friend, the honeybee.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Bee City USA® is a growing national certification program which is making the world safer for pollinators, one city and campus at a time. Greenwood, SC became a Bee City USA affiliate in March 2017. Learn more at

www.beecityusa.org

<http://www.cityofgreenwoodsc.com/living/green-spaces/bee-city-usa>