

PROJECT WILDLIFE: BISBEE

So you've bought into the idea that you should 'garden for wildlife' and many of you know that this means planting native plants for birds, bees, bats, bugs and so on who are called pollinators. But we are hearing from some of you that you have absolutely no idea how to go about actually doing it. We hope this column will help.

"Gardening for Wildlife" in residential gardens basically means providing food, water, shelter, cover, and places to raise young. Let's go backwards. Places to raise young: these include trees, shrubs or even cacti (cactus wrens build in chollas, mourning doves in paddle cactus). Failing any of these, you can provide nesting boxes which can range from elaborate structures on posts, to simple gourds hanging from trees, or even teapots or cast-off sneakers on a shelf or on the ground. Cover: places to go when threatened. Again, trees and shrubs are obvious, but a pile of rocks or sticks provide cover for bugs, leaf litter for insects and even a selection of pots carefully arranged on a tiny patio or balcony can provide a welcome place for a small lizard hiding from the next door neighbor's cat or a small bird realizing that a hawk is overhead.

Shelter: evergreen trees and shrubs, a garden shed or a garage overhang ... anywhere to get out of the wind or weather. Rosemary is one of the best. Not a native plant - more about this later - but a great help to a small critter in a monsoon rain.

Water. This can be as small as a slowly dripping faucet, as useful as an old pot or as beautiful as a fountain or a birdbath. Just know - as I didn't - that there are several critters who don't actually need to 'drink' ... butterflies get the minerals they need from a muddy puddle, lizards from the insects, and road-runners from the prey they munch on.

Now food. Birds, bees and butterflies eat nuts, seeds, fruit, nectar and insects. We aren't suggesting you provide the insects (although by creating a wildlife garden, insects will surely be there), but if you have just a couple of flowering trees and fruiting shrubs, an underplanting of a few colorful perennials and a sunny bed of annual wildflowers ... you've got it! You are there!

We can still hear 'yes, but which trees? which shrubs? which perennials?' (And maybe just a few "what are perennials anyways?" According to a gardening dictionary I once saw, "a perennial is a plant which, had it lived, would have come back every year.")

So here is a tiny, very opinionated possible list of plants in each category for small local gardens. Trees: you can't go wrong with Desert Willows (*Chilopsis*). "Timeless Beauty" is a tidy, small, deciduous tree, perfect for planting in threes to form a small shady grove or a single tree underplanted with perennials. Little leaf Ash (*Fraxinus greggii*) is another favorite: almost evergreen and a favorite with honey bees in early spring. Shrubs: Apache Plume (*Fallugia*) which can be kept at 4'x4' and provides white flowers on grey-green foliage. The whole plant becomes a waving halo of dusky pink when the flowers die down. And Desert Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia marrubifolia*) if you have the room: it is a bit bigger than Apache Plume, but a real hit with butterflies throughout the season, with small bright orange flowers against silver grey foliage. And Rosemary, always. For the scent and the almost year-round flowers.

Perennials: *Salvia greggii*. Autumn sages. Always and everywhere for underplanting the desert willows or on their own in full sun. *Limonii* is the native, though you won't find it in many nurseries. Which other perennials? *Salvia Cleveland*, bushier but so sweet smelling and such

a pretty, faded pale-blue. And of course, Mexican Sage, and

Annuals: Desert Marigolds and Chocolate Plants, Parry's Penstemons and Dogweeds, I have to stop. Google them, they are all irresistible. More is better than fewer. And always, once you have started, register your gardens with the National Wildlife Federation at www.nwf.org/certify. And tell us you did it at plantnativeinbisbee@gmail.com. Thank you.