



Winter habitat

Learn more about supporting pollinators over the winter!

With winter just around the corner, we wanted to talk about how we can support pollinators during the winter months.

Monarch butterflies are known for their dramatic migration across North America. While Eastern monarchs spend most of their time east of the Rocky Mountains and overwinter in Central Mexico, our Western monarchs overwinter along the California coast. This overwintering strategy creates the spectacular sight of thousands of adult monarchs clustered together in trees during the winter. But this strategy to wait out the winter in warmer forested groves is fairly unique among pollinators. Most pollinators do not migrate to warmer climates- instead they wait out the winter as eggs, larvae, or pupae.

About 30% of all bee species are cavity nesting bees, building their nests in plant stems, dead logs and other cavities. These bees spend the winter in their nests, waiting for spring. They often favor pithy stemmed plants, such as elderberry and Pacific aster. Leaving some stems intact during the winter, rather than cutting them all back will protect the cavity nesting bees that are spending the winter in these plant stems.

Many butterflies overwinter in the egg, larval (caterpillar), or pupal (chrysalis) stage, rather than as adults like monarchs. Butterfly larvae and pupae often spend the winter at the base of plants or under leaf litter. So it's important to leave some leaves and other plant litter in your habitat to provide a safe space for these animals to wait out the winter.

Many beneficial insects and pollinators, including lady beetles and bumble bees, overwinter underneath the shelter of bunch grasses.

Here are some handy tips for creating nesting and overwintering habitat for pollinators:

- Save stems
- Leave leaves
- Create some brush or rock piles
- Reduce lawn
- Reduce use of weed cloth (for ground nesting bees)
- Plant bunch grasses

Check out our publication on [Nesting and overwintering habitat](#) for more details. You can also find more information here:

<https://xerces.org/leave-the-leaves>

<https://xerces.org/blog/leave-the-leaves>

<https://xerces.org/blog/leave-leaves-these-invertebrates-depend-on-it>

<https://xerces.org/blog/where-do-pollinators-go-in-winter>

<https://xerces.org/blog/leave-leaves-to-benefit-wildlife>

Learn more about Xerces [California Monarch and Pollinator Habitat Kits](#)

Questions? Contact us at centralvalleypollinators@xerces.org

