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Baker Aboretum hosting lecture on garden pollinators

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For this year's distinguished lecture, the Baker Arboretum is hosting horticulturist Jason Reeves to speak on the importance of planting pollinator-attracting plants in gardens at 7 p.m. Sept. 20 at Knicely Conference Center.

"Pollinators are indicators of environmental health, and we should encourage their presence in gardens, and that's the purpose of this talk," said Dr. Martin Stone, director of the Baker Arboretum and a Western Kentucky University horticulture professor.

Pollinators are essentially sexual surrogates for flowering plants. To reproduce, pollen from one flower must be transferred to another flower of the same species. After pollination, flowers are able to produce ovaries, such as fruit.

"Basically, pollination is important in how a lot of your fruits and vegetables come about," said Dennis Williams, horticulturist at the Baker Arboretum. "It's really important to know plants that attract them and promote them ... every little bit that we do helps."

Pollinators assist with the reproduction of over 80 percent of the world's flowering plants, but deforestation for agriculture, pesticide use and climate change have contributed to a loss of habitat, disruptive flowering schedules, and now the endangerment or extinctions of pollinator species, such as bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

To play a role in pollinator conservation, horticulturists recommend people fill their gardens or green spaces with plants that bloom from early spring to late fall.

In his lecture, "Great Garden Plants – Attracting Bees, Butterflies and Other Pollinators," Reeves will divulge which flowering plants – including annuals, perennials, herbs, tropicals, trees and shrubs – are the best at attracting pollinators to gardens. He'll also point to underutilized green goodies that will enliven green spaces.

"He also will share really interesting pictures of some of the gardens he's been in and some of the projects going on at (the University of Tennessee Gardens)," Stone said.

Reeves is the curator of the University of Tennessee Gardens in Jackson, a landscape designer and a contributing editor to Fine Gardening magazine. Previously, Reeves has worked at the Opryland Conservatories in Nashville, Missouri Botanical Garden, Longwood Gardens and as a horticulturist in New Zealand.

"Jason is a cutting-edge horticulturist in our region," Stone said. "He has traveled globally working and studying plants, and has a lot of knowledge to share with the gardeners in our region about plants and pollinators."





A few pollinators optimized for the Southeast region include butterfly milkweed, black-eyed susans, wrinkle leaf goldenrod, Eastern redbuds, highbush blueberries and pasture roses, according to nonprofit Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

Before the talk, Stone recommends viewing a few examples of pollinator-attracting plants in a certified butterfly way station, the Baker Arboretum, which boasts 115 acres of dogwoods, magnolias, Japanese maples and conifers and is free and open to the public from Tuesday through Saturday.

The Baker Arboretum hosts a distinguished lecturer every year. Each individual is selected through careful research, and Reeves happened to be an easy choice this year, since Stone said he and Reeves belong to the same plant society and he's had the pleasure of hearing him speak previously.

"He's a dynamic speaker who has attracted a following regionally," Stone said.

The event is free and open to the public. The Knicely Conference Center is at 2355 Nashville Road in Bowling Green. The Baker Arboretum, which also houses the Downing Museum, is at 4801 Morgantown Road.

Caroline Eggers

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