

Guide to Pollinator-Friendly Spring Cleanup

By Deepika Saxena

Start when it's warmer

To be on the safe side, don't pull out your rake and shears until you have at least a 10-day stretch of warm weather, until temperatures are consistently about 50 degrees F. This will ensure overwintering insects have the chance to hatch out. Not only will you attract birds looking for those insects, as well as any leftover seed heads, you will start the season with a healthy garden ecosystem.

Keep it simple

When you do start to clean up, snap off plant stems and their seed heads and lay them gently, in loose piles, along the edge of your property. This way any life on or in them (eggs, partially grown caterpillars, chrysalises, cocoons) has a chance of surviving and continuing its metamorphosis (*photo right: moth chrysalis on tree branch*). An added benefit is that some of the perennials will set seed in the area, and you'll have wild flowers at the edge of your garden.



Rake up carefully

Wait as long as possible to rake leaves out of perennial beds and from under trees and shrubs.

Many butterflies such as morning cloaks and beneficial insects like ladybugs nestle into leaf litter for the winter as adults, eggs, or pupae. Luna moths spend the winter in cocoons that look just like a crinkled brown leaf. As you rake up your leaves keep a sharp eye out for these insects and do your best not to disturb them. Better yet, don't rake these areas at all - this fallen material will break down and provide natural fertilizer for your yard.



Leave some "stem stubble"

Break off substantial stems at a height of 12-15" for native bees that nest in cavities (many of our native bees nest in woody ends of plant stems). These hollow stems will serve as overwintering sites for future generations of insects and the new growth in the plant will soon grow and hide them.

Don't mulch till last

There are many beneficial insects and pollinators who burrow into the soil to overwinter as eggs, pupae, or adults. Covering the ground with a layer of mulch too early in the spring may block their

emergence. Hold off on mulching until early summer when seedlings have emerged; and then use natural much such as untreated grass clippings, leaves and pine needles.

Prune with great care

When pruning back woody perennials or shrubs, keep a lookout for cocoons and chrysalises. Many moths and butterflies spend the winter in a delicate cocoon dangling from a branch. You can cut these back later in the season.

Garden cleanup should be a constructive process.

By taking your time and doing it right, your garden will become a habitat that will support a healthy population of birds, butterflies, bees, pest-munching beneficial insects and other Pollinators.



Leave some cocoons for hungry birds to find! Above, tufted titmouse with polyphemus moth cocoon.