e-GRO Alert

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Wildlife Appeal In Ornamental Plant Choices

Landscapes benefit wildlife which may be a value-added opportunity for homeowners. Here, we discuss a 2023-2024 study addressing U.S. consumers' preferences for wildlife in their landscapes.

Environmental benefits are a key value-added of ornamental plants (Hall & Knuth, 2019). Plants provide habitat and food for birds, insects and other wildlife (Helfand et al., 2006; Nickerson et al., 2023). However, not all wildlife may be equally desired in one's landscape (Figure 1). Here, we share key findings from a Horticulture Research Institute funded study conducted in 2023-2024 that addressed U.S. consumers' interest in different types of wildlife in their landscapes.

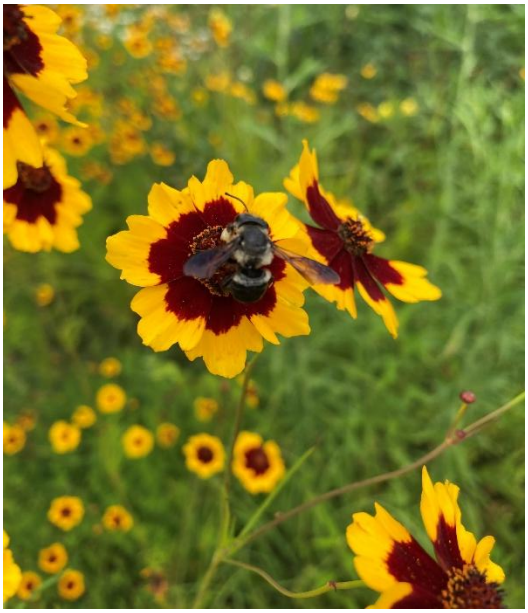

Figure 1. Customers are interested in aiding pollinator insects.

Photo source: A. Rihn

An online survey collected responses from across the U.S. Different geographical areas were of interest given the plethora of different wildlife that live in those regions. A total of 2,011 people completed the survey. Participants were asked their nature relatedness using several nature and environment statements (e.g., "My ideal vacation spot would be a remote, wilderness area") and their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree) was used to measure their value of nature and the environment. Generally, participants exhibited a heightened interest with a mean rating of 4.88 on the 7-point nature relatedness scale.

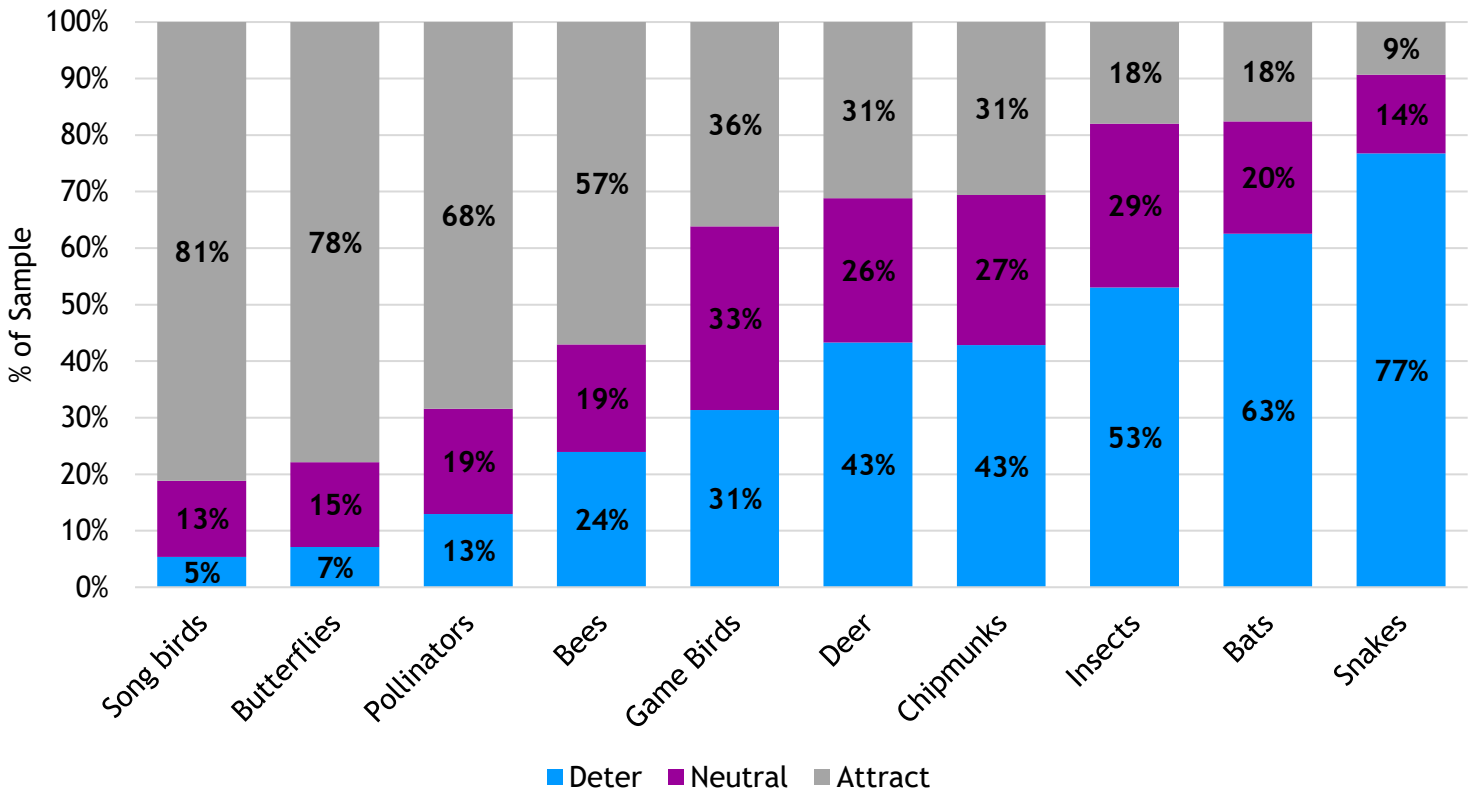

Figure 2. U.S. Consumers' Interest in Wildlife in Their Landscapes (n2011).

Next, participants indicated their interest in attracting (or deterring) ten different types of wildlife to their home landscapes (Figure 2). The ten types of wildlife included bats, bees, butterflies, chipmunks, deer, game birds, insects, pollinators (in general), snakes, and songbirds. Based on participants' ratings, the wildlife was divided into three groups, 1. Crowd favorites, 2. Maybe-maybe not, and 3. Ick or phobia wildlife. The crowd favorites included songbirds with 81% of the sample wanting to attract them to their yards, butterflies (78% of the sample selected "attract"), pollinators (68% selected "attract"), and bees (57% selected "attract"). The maybe-maybe not wildlife included game birds, deer and chipmunks. Participants were equally divided between wanting to attract, neither attract or deter ("neutral"), or deter these types of wildlife. Lastly, the ick or phobia wildlife included insects (53% of the sample wanted to deter), bats (63% wanted to deter), and snakes (77% wanted to deter).

Several factors impacted participants' ratings. For the maybe-maybe not wildlife, people with children in their homes wanted to attract gamebirds, deer and chipmunks to their landscapes. Conversely, women and older participants did not want to attract these types of wildlife. For the insects and snakes, participants with bachelor's degrees or higher were interested in attracting these types of wildlife to their yards.

Interestingly, participants from suburban or urban areas did not want to attract any of the types of wildlife included in the study. Conversely, participants with greater native plant knowledge and those with higher nature relatedness scores wanted to attract all types of wildlife.

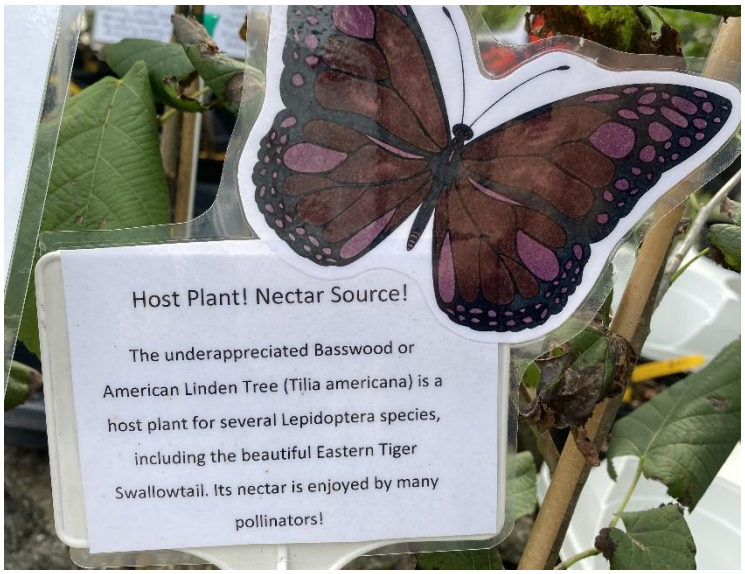

Figure 3. Point-of-sale sign at a retail garden center in Knoxville, TN.

Photo source: A. Rihn

Figure 4. People with children are interested in plants that attract different types of wildlife.

Photo source: A. Rihn

Overall, wildlife benefits can be used to engage customers and direct them to ornamental plants that appeal to their needs. Based on the study, several suggestions were developed, including:

1. Use point-of-sale (POS) information to quickly identify which plants benefit the crowd favorite wildlife (i.e., songbirds, butterflies, pollinators, bees). Images or logos may be the most efficient way of communicating this information given that customers can understand the type of wildlife benefitting from the plant (Figure 3).
2. If your market is nature enthusiasts (i.e., individuals with high nature relatedness ratings) or the native plant market, highlighting the plants' wildlife benefits (regardless of the type of wildlife) would appeal to this market and may inspire them to install additional wildlife friendly plantings.
3. Households with young children are more receptive to the maybe - maybe not wildlife (i.e., game birds, deer, chipmunks; Figure 4). Likely, this occurs due to the larger size allowing the children to observe nature from a distance. There may be potential to incorporate educational information or games to heightened the wildlife-nature-child interaction opportunities for these customers for both the crowd favorite and maybe – maybe not types of wildlife.

Generally, customers appear to be interested in attracting wildlife to their landscapes but have clear preferences. If you are considering incorporating wildlife promotions into your business, carefully consider who primarily buys your products and which types of wildlife may appeal to them. For the full research article, please see:

Rihn, A., S. Barton, A. Torres, B.K. Behe. 2024. Into the Wild – U.S. Consumer Preferences for Residential Landscape Wildlife. Journal of Environmental Horticulture, 42(4):201-209. https://doi.org/10.24266/0738-2898-42.4.201.

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