FAMILY ACTIVITY: EGG CARTON NURSERY

Create a small garden using egg cartons to attract helpful bees. After you create your garden, observe bees pollinating flowers.

Flowers attract bees and bees are important for producing food. Bees pollinate crops, and pollination is required for plants to make seeds. Pollen is the yellow dust that you see on flowers. When bees land on flowers, they get pieces of pollen stuck to their bodies, and they move that pollen from flower to flower when they land on different flowers. Bumblebees, other wild bees, butterflies, wasps and flies are all pollinators. Recently, bee populations have declined because of climate change, loss of habitat diversity, and bee-killing pesticides. It’s important to create habitats that attract bees and help them stay alive, and we can do that by planting wildflowers that attract bees.

MATERIALS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Materials:
- Cardboard egg carton
- Pencil
- Potting soil
- Flower seeds like alyssum, geraniums, poppies, aster, lavender, and/or black-eyed Susan
- Plate or tray
- Bowl
- Spray bottle
- Water
- Coffee grounds (optional)

Instructions:
1. Use a pencil to poke three small holes in the bottom of each of the individual cups in the egg carton.
2. Fill each egg carton cup ¾ full with potting soil. You can mix used coffee grounds with potting soil in a ratio of 3/4 soil to ¼ coffee grounds if desired.
3. Place a few seeds in each cup. Cover with a thin layer of potting soil.
4. Place the egg carton on a waterproof plate or tray. Place in a warm, sunny spot inside of your house.
5. Spray a small amount of water on the carton every other day, or when you notice that the soil is dried out. You want the soil to stay moist but not soaked. If you see water coming out of the bottom you are watering too much.
6. Once the seeds sprout and have multiple sets of strong leaves, they can be taken outside for the bees to enjoy. This usually takes 4-5 weeks.
7. Cut the egg carton into individual cups and transplant the small plants into the ground or into larger pots. Egg cartons made of paper can be planted directly into the ground because they will biodegrade, or fully break down over time. Make sure you check the sun requirements for each type of plant before transplanting.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Become a citizen scientist and volunteer for BeeSpotter

University of Illinois researchers need help from people like us to collect information about
bees. Sign up by going to beespotter.org, then submit your photos of bees that will be used to track bee populations nationally

2. **Readings about bees**

Read *Give Bees a Chance* by Bethany Barton or *From Seed to Plant* by Gail Gibbons to learn about the importance of bees and plants that support bees.