



Lauren's St. Julian's Crossing habitat is beautiful in summer -- but just as important to her wildlife in winter!

SUPPORTING POLLINATORS AFTER A FREEZE

EMBRACING IMPERFECTION IN THE GARDEN

By Lauren Simpson

The deep freeze has come and gone, and our gardens look pretty dreary, with leaves drooping and flowers fading. We want to prune, pull, and put in order! But bees, butterflies, and other pollinators need us to wait just a little longer. Here are three ways that we can embrace imperfection in our gardens to help pollinators emerge safely from winter.

- **Embrace the stems.**

After a freeze, our first impulse is to prune dormant stems and twigs. But leaving these intact through early spring can help bees. The vast majority of our native bees are "[solitary](#)," meaning that they don't nest in hives like honey bees. Instead, females lay their eggs in nesting compartments dedicated to their own offspring. [Roughly 30%](#) of solitary bees nest in wood, hollow or pithy plant stems, and other cavities. The young of the tiny bees nesting in stems won't emerge until the spring, so cutting back old stems too early can harm the bees developing inside. The solution is to leave these stems intact through early spring. Read more about attracting and supporting stem-nesting bees [here](#) and [here](#) .



***Open-ended, pithy stems and twigs
can provide nesting sites for small solitary bees.***

- **Embrace the leaves.**

We should also allow fallen leaves to remain in our garden beds because they [shelter many kinds of wildlife](#) , including [beneficial insects](#) . For example, the adults of some butterflies will overwinter in leaf piles, while some moth and butterfly caterpillars spend winter wrapped in a leaf. And beneficial insects that eat garden pests will also shelter here. So as much as possible, leave the leaves.



***Using leaf litter as mulch benefits
wildlife and nourishes the soil.***

- **Embrace the "weeds."**

Nectar is a commodity in short supply after a deep freeze. So especially when our gardens are bare, we let [early-blooming wildflowers flourish](#) in our landscape—for example, [Wood Sorrels](#) , [Crow Poison](#) , and [Carolina Geranium](#) . This also means we wait as long as possible to mow when the grass is dormant in

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winter. Not only does less mowing allow these nectar sources to grow when little else does, but it also reduces air pollution and leaves wildlife undisturbed.



*Early blooming wildflowers sustain pollinators. From left to right: honey bee, native solitary bee, (suspected genus *Andrena*), and hoverfly (*Toxomerus marginatus*)*

By embracing a little imperfection, we can help pollinators a lot!

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- **Links to more on her garden and organizations to contact about similar certifications:**
 - [facebook.com/St-Julians-Crossing-wildlife-habitat-1609337762653792/](https://www.facebook.com/St-Julians-Crossing-wildlife-habitat-1609337762653792/)
 - [iNaturalist](#) (user name: "*laurenjansensimpson*").
 - [Monarch Watch](#)
 - [National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat](#)
 - [Monarch Watch Waystation / National Wildlife Federation](#)
 - [North American Butterfly Association Certified Butterfly Garden](#)

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