



*Left, Lauren's wildlife-habitat gardens, St. Julian's Crossing, in spring 2018  
Right, Milkweed Assassin Bug (*Zelus longipes*), a beneficial garden predator, feeding on a fly*

## GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE AS A CITIZEN SCIENTIST

**By Lauren J. Simpson**

We know that birds, butterflies, and bees are in trouble. We want to help, but we don't always know the best ways. After all, most of us are not entomologists, wildlife biologists, or even botanists.

The good news is that we need not be scientists to help wildlife. All we need is a willingness to adapt gardening practices to support wildlife and a desire to observe and record.

In other words, while we garden, we can be citizen scientists. [Scistarter](#)

describes a citizen scientist as "an individual who voluntarily contributes his or her time, effort, and resources toward scientific research in collaboration with professional scientists or alone."

We gardeners are particularly well-suited for this because we encounter wildlife frequently.

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*Left: tiny Ligated Furrow Bee ([Halictus ligatus](#)), peeking out of her nesting hole in the ground  
Right, Gulf Fritillary butterfly caterpillar ([Agraulis vanillae](#)), feeding on a passionvine species,  
its host plant -- both in Lauren's wildlife-habitat gardens, St. Julian's Crossing, in spring 2018*

**Here's how you can support wildlife as you garden:**

- **ADAPT.** Our gardens must welcome wildlife, which happens when we adapt our gardening in ways like these:
  - Avoid pesticides: let [predators](#) keep pests in check.
  - Use compost or organic fertilizers.
  - Leave some [bare, undisturbed ground for bees' nests](#) (70% of native bees nest in ground).
  - Reduce mowing (which scares wildlife, removes food and cover, and pollutes).
  - Leave dead stems until spring because [tiny bees may nest or shelter inside](#).
  - [Allow leaves to stay in beds](#) because wildlife shelters under them in winter.
  - Use [native plants](#) because [they feed more wildlife and work better here](#).
  - Select flowers of [varying sizes, shapes, colors, and bloom times](#).
  - Include plants that feed caterpillars.
- **OBSERVE.** As you garden, be mindful of plant and animal relationships.
  - Which plants feed which animals, and when?
  - Which animals eat your garden pests?
  - What attracts pests and predators alike to your garden?
  - Knowing these connections will help you to understand the web of life and also to choose what, where, and when to plant.
- **SHARE.** Share your observations on citizen-science platforms, such as

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- [iNaturalist](#), [Nature's Notebook](#),
- [Bugguide](#),
- [Bumble Bee Watch](#),
- [Journey North](#),
- and educational communities.
- Find citizen-science opportunities through sites such as
  - [Scistarter](#),
  - [citizenscience.gov](http://citizenscience.gov), and
  - [National Geographic](#).

When we share, we give scientists the data they need to help the wildlife that we treasure.

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