



THE POWER OF POLLINATORS

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Dr. Rachel Mallinger, Assistant Professor of Pollinator Ecology and Conservation with the University of Florida (UF), strives to better understand the native pollinators of Florida to benefit agriculture, the environment, consumers, and the pollinators themselves. On her interest in insects, Dr. Mallinger shared: “they’re diverse, they have fascinating behaviors, and they’re also really important ecologically and environmentally and economically”

Since coming to UF in 2017, Mallinger’s lab has focused on several exciting projects to better understand the behaviors, benefits, and conservation of native bees and other pollinators.

The European honeybee, which is not native to Florida, may get a lot of attention for their pollination ability but native bees also play an important role in agriculture and ecosystems. There are over 300 individual bee species within Florida, and each has its own unique behavior and environmental requirements. Native bees pollinate many different plants including crops such as blueberries, strawberries, melons, and apples, as well as many more plants that grow in natural areas. However, many details of their roles are not well known and Dr. Mallinger’s research is working to enhance our knowledge.

Understanding the unique behaviors and preferences of native pollinators could help plant breeders develop new varieties and cultivars to take

better advantage of this resource, possibly leading to bigger yields.

At UF’s Austin Cary Forest, Mallinger studies how land conservation practices impact pollinators. In the research forest, scientists used prescribed burn rotations to manage and restore portions of the forest vegetation. While prescribed fire is an important tool in land management, Mallinger examines how burning at different times of the year may affect native pollinator populations.

Mallinger said homeowners can support pollinators by planting a diverse array of native blooming plants and use insecticides intelligently. Another tip is to leave areas of bare ground to also help for native bees who are ground nesters and install pollinator boxes for certain species of bees and wasps.

To find more information about Dr. Mallinger’s research and lab, check out <http://www.rachelmallinger.com/>.

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