How Pollination Works

Follow the pollen. Notice the visitors.



Follow a grain of pollen

Pollination moves pollen from an anther, where pollen is made, to a stigma, where pollen is received.

1. Pollen is made

The anther makes pollen.

↓

2. Pollen travels

An animal may pick it up during a flower visit.

↓

3. Pollen arrives

Compatible pollen reaches a stigma.

↓

4. Seeds may develop

After fertilization, seeds can begin to form.

Pollen may move within one flower or between flowers of the same species. Wind can carry pollen too. Pollination and fertilization are different steps.

More than bees and butterflies

Hoverflies, beetles, hawk moths, wasps and other animals also move pollen. Ants pollinate some plants; many ant visits do not.

Put the pollen journey in order

Write 1, 2, 3 or 4 in each box. Use page 2 to help.

☐ After fertilization, seeds can begin to form.

☐ An animal picks up pollen during a flower visit.

☐ An anther makes pollen.

☐ Compatible pollen reaches a stigma.

Think like a scientist

A beetle sits on a flower. Does that prove pollination happened? Explain.

Challenge: name a pollen carrier that is not an animal.

Compare two flower patches

With an adult, choose two patches of flowering plants you can safely watch. Do not touch or capture the visitors.

Watch each patch for five minutes, close together in time. Count landings on flowers. A visitor that leaves and returns counts as another landing.

Patch A

Plant / flower: _____

Time and weather: _____

Number of open flowers: _____

Visitor groups noticed: _____

Total landings: _____

Patch B

Plant / flower: _____

Time and weather: _____

Number of open flowers: _____

Visitor groups noticed: _____

Total landings: _____

What did you notice?

Which patch had more landings? Could flower number, weather, shade or time affect your counts?

_____

_____

Counts show visits, not proven pollination.

Answers and a place to shelter

Pollen journey: 4, 2, 1, 3 (top to bottom).

Scientist question: no. A flower visit does not show whether compatible pollen reached a stigma. The beetle may have been feeding or resting.

Challenge: wind. Observation answers will vary; no patch must have more visitors.

Protect the whole life cycle

Ask an adult to leave leaves and old stems in a sheltered garden area in fall. Many pollinators spend winter in leaves, stems or soil.



Delay spring cleanup until later in your local season. One warm day does not mean every insect has emerged. Keep some shelter undisturbed all year.

One habitat action I could take:

Using this guide

Designed for children ages 8-12. Read and explore with a grown-up.

Print on US Letter paper (8.5 x 11 inches), portrait, at actual size (100%). These pages are printable, not fillable. Write or draw by hand.

Illustrations introduce broad visitor groups; they are not a species identification key.

The flower-patch comparison measures visits, not successful pollination. The same animal may be counted more than once. Zero visits is a useful observation too.

USDA: Pollination

Xerces: Pollinators

Xerces: Winter shelter

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