

June Plant Highlights: Birds & Bats as Pollinators

**Please note: due to the ever-changing and growing nature of the Conservatory, plants may move locations and flowers and fruit may not always be visible.

Variegated Shrimp Plant



Where do we find it in the Conservatory and why do we find it here?

Our variegated shrimp plant is in the Palm House. This plant is naturally from Mexico, where the climate can be very warm and tropical—just like our Palm House!

How does it grow or reproduce and what is special about it?

The variegated shrimp plant reproduces through flowers and seeds. Artificially, it can be propagated through stem cuttings.

How do humans use it or interact with it?

Variegated shrimp plants are typically used ornamentally. Recently, however, scientists have started to research the chemical properties of the variegated shrimp plant and others in its genus. Some of the early findings suggest that chemicals in these plants have antitumor, antiviral, and antidiabetic properties!

What is its pollination story?

The variegated shrimp plant's flower is not what it may seem...The pink part that looks like a shrimp is not actually the flower! This part of the plant is actually a "bract," which is a modified leaf that tends to attract pollinators with its bright colors and is associated with the reproductive structure of the plant. The reproductive structure, in this case, is the flower, which extends from the bract. The flower is delicate, white, and tubular in its shape. The shape of the flower is perfect for its pollinators: hummingbirds and butterflies! The long, curved beak of a hummingbird fits perfectly with the tube-shaped flower. The same can be said for the long, thin proboscis of a butterfly. When butterflies and hummingbirds drink nectar from the shrimp plant, they also pick up pollen that they carry to other shrimp plant flowers!

June Plant Highlights: Birds & Bats as Pollinators

**Please note: due to the ever-changing and growing nature of the Conservatory, plants may move locations and flowers and fruit may not always be visible.

Agave



Where do we find it in the Conservatory and why do we find it here?

You can find the agave in the Desert House—it has many interesting adaptations to help it survive in the hot, dry, desert climate!

How does it grow or reproduce and what is special about it?

Naturally, the agave will produce through flowers and seeds, runners, or rhizomes. Runners are similar to rhizomes in that they are modified stems from which new plants can grow; the difference is that runners grow aboveground while rhizomes typically grow underground.

What is its pollination story?

Agave will only flower once in its lifetime! Since it only flowers once, it is very important that its flower can attract the attention of its pollinators. In this case, the agave flowers by shooting up a tall mast from which many tubular flowers grow. The mast can grow up to twenty feet tall! This incredible height is perfect for the agave's pollinator—the bat! The shape of its flowers is also ideal for bats' long, bristly tongues. When bats drink the agave nectar from the flowers, pollen gets on their heads, which they then inadvertently deposit on the flowers of other agave plants.

June Plant Highlights: Birds & Bats as Pollinators

**Please note: due to the ever-changing and growing nature of the Conservatory, plants may move locations and flowers and fruit may not always be visible.

Hibiscus



Where do we find it in the Conservatory and why do we find it here?

Our hibiscus is located in our Children's Garden, where it enjoys the warm, tropical conditions that they are accustomed to in the wild. Additionally, hibiscus flowers are big, bright, and beautiful—both children and adults like to look at them!

How does it grow or reproduce and what is special about it?

The hibiscus is a flowering plant that reproduces with seeds. It is a hearty tropical plant and can thus adapt to grow in non-tropical spaces, such as urban balconies. It flowers year-round, as well, making it a great addition to indoor and outdoor gardens!

How do humans use or interact with it?

While beautiful to look at, the hibiscus also serves several practical functions. We often use hibiscus flowers for tea and the flower can also be dried and eaten as a snack. Additionally, a variety of species of hibiscus serve as the national flower of countries from Haiti to South Korea. In Hawaii and Tahiti, women tuck hibiscus flowers behind their ears: if the flower is tucked behind the right ear, the woman is single and if the flower is tucked behind the left ear, the woman is married. Finally, hibiscus is symbolic in certain religions, such as Hinduism.

What is its pollination story?

Birds are the primary pollinator of hibiscus flowers. Regardless of the species of hibiscus, the plant will attract its pollinators through the bright, beautiful colors of its flowers! The center of many hibiscus flowers is a different color than the rest of the petals, which creates an almost bulls-eye image that helps attract pollinators. Finally, the shape of the hibiscus flower promotes pollination. The throat of the flower is very deep, so in order for birds to get to the nectar, they have to bump against the stamen of the hibiscus, which is where the pollen is!