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The Night Shift

Imagine competing with other plants for all those buzzing insects. From the plant's point of view, a pollinator shared is a pollinator wasting your pollen. From the pollinator's point of view, stopping at an empty flower is a waste of time and energy. Little wonder that some plants have sought a less competitive scene and delayed blooming until the night shift.

In the Americas pollinating bats can be found in deserts or lush tropical forests. In Arizona bats pollinate the state flower, the saguaro, along with the elegant candelabra-like century plants (*Agave* spp.).

In Southeast Asia, tropical Africa, and the Pacific islands, over 300 plants rely solely on bats for pollination. Among these are the fruit bats, gentle giants with wingspans up to six feet, who are extraordinary pollinators and seed dispersers. They leave a bounty of tasty fruits in their wake. We owe the delicious flavors of bananas, guavas, and mangoes to these bats. In addition to food, useful products such as medicines, dyes, timber, fibers, and fuel come from bat-pollinated plants.

Bats are highly vulnerable to extinction. They reproduce slowly, usually bearing one offspring per year and are often killed by humans who fear them. Around the world, about 22% of bat species are considered threatened.

Bat Garden