

Planting for Pollinators

PLANTS AND INSECTS HAVE CO-EVOLVED TO SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN THEIR NATURAL environment. Plants house nectar and pollen within their flowers. Pollinators visit flowers to consume this nectar and pollen as food and in turn fertilize the plants' flowers, aiding the plant in its own reproduction. This interaction is incredibly beneficial to both parties and is one of the most effective forms of plant reproduction. Even though their small size may make them easy to overlook, pollinating insects are integral to the preservation of our landscape as we know it. You can support pollinators in your own garden by following these guidelines:

PRIORITIZE NATIVE PLANTS

Native plants should form the foundation of your pollinator planting. Having co-evolved in the same location, these plants and insects have complex, interdependent relationships. Native plants have flowers that pollinators know how to access, food resources readily recognized by pollinators, and bloom at times that pollinators have come to expect.

DESIGN FOR CONTINUOUS BLOOM

Pollinators have an incredibly diverse range of life cycles that span the entire year. Some specialist bees, like the spring beauty mining bee, come out in early spring to forage on ephemeral wildflowers and mate, and then return underground to overwinter before there are even leaves on the trees. Other bees, like bumblebees, emerge in spring and will have a colony that is active until the first frost. Different pollinators have key life cycle stages happening at all times of the year, so it is important to have flowers providing nectar and pollen resources in every season.

INCORPORATE A VARIETY OF FLOWER TYPES

Plants have evolved their distinct flower shapes to attract different pollinators. Some plants, such as mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum* spp.) feature an open crown of flowers well-suited to any size pollinator, from the tiniest sweat bee to a large carpenter bee. Other flowers, like beardtongue (*Penstemon* spp.) or bee balm (*Monarda* spp.), have long tubes that are best suited to pollinators with long tongues, such as bumblebees or hummingbirds. To accommodate pollinators of all shapes and sizes—of which there are many—it is important to keep a variety of flower shapes in your garden.

BE MINDFUL OF CULTIVARS

“Cultivar” is a blend of “cultivated variety” and refers to a plant that was selectively bred by humans for a particular trait or set of traits. Although cultivars are widely available in nurseries and can address many landscape problems, they can be less valuable to pollinators. Many traits that are appealing to gardeners, such as an increased number of petals or a change in petal or foliage color, can render a flower unrecognizable to a pollinator, or even leave that flower sterile. Sterile flowers do not produce the nectar or pollen that are essential to the life cycle of pollinators. Additionally, altered foliage colors can leave a plant distasteful to caterpillars. It is worth considering a cultivar that more closely resembles the straight species if your goal is to support wildlife.

Mountain mint
(*Pycnanthemum muticum*)



Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*)





Showy goldenrod
(*Solidago speciosa*)

HAVE FUN EXPERIMENTING

Native plants are a diverse and inspiring palette to work with. There is a great choice for every area of the garden that not only beautifies your space, but also offers resources for wildlife. Fostering these interactions is rewarding for you and the creatures that share your garden.

When selecting plants for pollinator support, you should consider nursery availability, budget, time, and personal taste. The trick with ecological gardening is learning how to balance these human constraints with the needs of wildlife. Keeping the above guidelines in mind can help gardeners navigate horticultural offerings and make a decision that maximizes the ecological value of their limited space for more impactful plant choices.

Come shop for native plants in The Garden Shop at Jenkins! Our seasonal inventory of pollinator-approved plants can add ornamental and ecological value to any landscape.

Foxglove beardtongue
(*Penstemon digitalis*)



Top 10 Herbaceous Plants for Pollinators

PLANT NAME	BENEFITS
FOXGLOVE BEARDTONGUE <i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	Foxglove beardtongue is a key plant for bees—it bridges the gap in blooms between late spring and early summer and provides ample nectar for a wide range of pollinators.
MOUNTAIN MINT <i>Pycnanthemum</i> spp.	Mountain mints are consistently ranked as one of the most popular plants among pollinators. Their open arrangement of white flowers makes them a great food resource for many kinds of insects large and small.
ANISE HYSSOP <i>Agastache foeniculum</i>	The unique purple spires of anise hyssop flowers are always covered in pollinators. It has a strong scent, and the leaves are delicious brewed in a tea with honey.
BEE BALM <i>Monarda</i> spp.	Bee balm's interesting flower shape is a great firework of color in a flower bed and showcases interesting pollinator behaviors like nectar robbing. The red color of <i>Monarda didyma</i> is a favorite of hummingbirds.
MEADOW BLAZING STAR <i>Liatris ligulistylis</i>	This species of <i>Liatris</i> is a knockout for monarch butterflies. It releases a scent that reportedly mimics a monarch pheromone and attracts them in droves.
ZIGZAG GOLDENROD <i>Solidago flexicaulis</i>	Zigzag goldenrod has a bright spike of yellow in fall that is especially cheery in the shade where it thrives. It's delightful next to just about any other shade plant.
STIFF GOLDENROD <i>Solidago rigida</i>	The rough texture of this goldenrod is a great contrast to the softer leaves of herbaceous plantings, and its tall flower cap is striking. It is consistently ranked highly for pollinator visitation rates.
SHOWY GOLDENROD <i>Solidago speciosa</i>	Showy goldenrod earned its name with its large yellow plumes and is a stunning straight species plant.
SMOOTH BLUE ASTER <i>Symphyotrichum laeve</i> 'Bluebird'	Smooth blue aster has a nice upright form, and the blue of its flowers is almost electric. This cultivar in particular is a top performer among pollinators.
WILD QUININE <i>Parthenium integrifolium</i>	The large white flowers of wild quinine are complemented by a unique sandpaper-textured foliage. Although often overlooked in herbaceous plantings, it pairs nicely with the bold colors of other summer blooming perennials.