INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION FACT SHEET

Upper Midwest Plants

for Native Bees

Pollinators are a vital part of a healthy environment.

Native bees are North America's most important group of pollinators.

Patches of flowers can be grown almost anywhere and will form an important food resource for bees.

Bumble bee foraging on Oregano. *Photo by Eric Mader*

Pollinators are a diverse and fascinating group of animals. In addition to their beauty, pollinators provide an important link in our environment by moving pollen between flowers and ensuring the growth of seeds and fruits. The work of pollinators touches our lives every day through the food we eat. Even our seasons are marked by their work: the bloom of springtime meadows, summer berry picking, pumpkins in the fall.

Native bees are the most important group of pollinators. Like all wildlife they are affected by changes in our landscapes. The good news is that there are straightforward things that you can do to help: providing patches of flowers is something that we all can do to improve our environment for these important insects. Native plants are undoubtedly the best source of food for bees, but there are also some garden plants that are great for pollinators.

This fact sheet will help you provide flowers that these vital creatures need and make the landscape around us—from small urban backyards to large natural areas—better for bees. On the back you'll find a simple guide to selecting plants for bees.

For more information, visit our web site, www.xerces.org, where you will find other fact sheets and more detailed guidelines on how to enhance habitat for pollinators. You'll also find information about the *Pollinator Conservation Handbook*.

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Choosing the Right Flowers

To help bees and other pollinator insects—like butterflies—you should provide a range of plants that will offer a succession of flowers, and thus pollen and nectar, through the whole growing season. Patches of foraging habitat can be created in many different locations, from backyards and school grounds to golf courses and city parks. Even a small area planted with the right flowers will be beneficial, because each patch will add to the mosaic of habitat available to bees and other pollinators.

In such a short fact sheet it is not possible to give detailed lists of suitable plants for all areas of the Upper Midwest. Below are two lists of good bee plants, the first of native plants and the second of garden plants. Both are short lists; there are many more bee-friendly plants. However, these lists, combined with the following notes, will get you started on selecting good bee plants. Your local chapters of the Wild Ones, the Native Plant Society and native plant nurseries are worthwhile contacts for advice on choosing, obtaining, and caring for local plant species.

- **Use local native plants.** Research suggests native plants are four times more attractive to native bees than exotic flowers. In gardens, heirloom varieties of herbs and perennials can also provide good foraging.
- **Chose several colors of flowers.** Flower colors that particularly attract native bees are blue, purple, violet, white, and yellow.
- **Plant flowers in clumps.** Flowers clustered into clumps of one species will attract more pollinators than individual plants scattered through the habitat patch. Where space allows, make the clumps four feet or more in diameter.
- **Include flowers of different shapes.** Bees are all different sizes, have different tongue lengths, and will feed on different shaped flowers. Consequently, providing a range of flower shapes means more bees can benefit.
- **Have a diversity of plants flowering all season.** By having several plant species flowering at once, and a sequence of plants flowering through spring, summer, and fall, you can support a range of bee species that fly at different times of the season.

Native Plants

Native plants should be your first choice to help our native bees. Listed below are some plants that are good sources of nectar and pollen for bees. This list is not exhaustive; there are many other plants good for bees. Individual species have not been included. Not all of these genera will have species in your local area, but they do represent plants that will grow in a variety of environments. Use a wildflower guide or contact local nurseries to find your local species.

Aster	*Aster*	Lupine	*Lupinus*
Bergamont	*Monarda*	Milkweed	*Asclepias*
Blazingstar	*Liatris*	New Jersey tea	*Ceanothus*
Cupplant	*Silphium*	Obedient plant	*Physostegia*
False indigo	*Baptisia*	Penstemon	*Penstemon*
Fireweed	*Epilobium*	Prairie clover	*Dalea*
Goldenrod	*Solidago*	Purple coneflower	*Echinacea*
Hyssop	*Agastache*	Rattlesnake master	*Eryngium*
Ironweed	*Veronia*	Spiderwort	*Tradescantia*
Joe Pye weed	*Eupatorium*	Steeplebush	*Spirea*
Leadplant	*Amorpha*	Sunflower	*Helianthus*
Lobelia	*Lobelia*	Willow	*Salix*

Garden Plants

Flower beds in gardens, business campuses, and parks are great places to have bee-friendly plants. Native plants will create a beautiful garden but some people prefer “garden” plants. Many garden plants are varieties of native plants. This list includes plants from other countries—”exotic” plants—and should be used as a supplement to the native plant list. As with the native plants, this list is far from exhaustive.

Basil	*Ocimum*	Marjoram	*Origanum*
Borage	*Borago*	Rosemary	*Rosmarinus*
Carmint	*Nepeta*	Russian sage	*Perovskia*
Cosmos	*Cosmos*	Spearmint	*Mentha*
Lavender	*Lavandula*	Squill	*Scilla*

For more pollinator conservation information, go to www.xerces.org

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