

Pollinator-friendly cut flower plants

Adding appropriate flowering plants to the farm or garden landscape promotes insect diversity and sustainability in the system. Pollinators are vital for some fruit and vegetable production. They increase fruit size, yield, and quality in many other fruits and vegetables that are self-pollinating. Pollinator-friendly plants are also attractive to other species of insects – many of them beneficial (e.g. hover flies, ladybird beetles and parasitic wasps). Flowers may produce pollen (a source of protein needed for insect egg production) and/or nectar (a source of carbohydrates needed for energy). Flower size and shape determine the insects that are attracted to the flower. In general, small, shallow flowers attract small bees, flies and wasps. Larger, deeper flowers tend to attract honeybees, bumblebees, and butterflies. White or light-colored flowers that release their fragrance at night attract night-flying moths.

When you plant for pollinators – remember:

Avoid plants with double flowers, the nectar and pollen is usually not accessible (or not present at all).

Don't use plants bred to be “pollen-free” (e.g. some cultivars of sunflowers) – they won't be feeding the bees.

Plants that are nourished and watered will provide better food for pollinators (and usually better cut flowers as well).

Bees can't see the color red so they won't normally utilize red flowers (unless the red color has an ultraviolet light component in it). However, these flowers are often quite attractive to hummingbirds.

Plan for a full season of flowering – pollinators are present from early spring to late fall. Deadhead plants to encourage prolonged bloom. Weeds (i.e. dandelions and goldenrod) can provide excellent early spring and late fall pollen and nectar for pollinators.

Cultivars of good bee plants may or may not be good bee plants. When plant breeders tinker around with plant characteristics, they may inadvertently change the food value of the nectar and/or pollen that the plant produces. If I have knowledge that a specific cultivar is a good bee plant, the cultivar name will be indicated below the species name in the charts below.

PERENNIALS – All take full sun, are adapted to the mid-Atlantic region, and need well-drained soil (unless otherwise indicated).

"Native" is indicated for plants that are native anywhere in the continental United States.

COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	HT.	FLOWER COLOR	BLOOMS	NOTES & SOURCE CODES
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i> 'Summer Pastels' (ok from seed), 'Cerise Queen', 'Colorado'	1-3'	many	summer	native, white is best for pollinators, can dry flowers, rapid spreader Ch Co J JC S SofC T

Allium	<i>Allium</i> spp.	1-4'	white, pink, purple, & yellow	late spring/ summer	bulbs, plant in fall, tolerates drought, deadhead <i>A. tuberosum</i> & <i>A. caeruleum</i> to avoid weed problems, can dry flowers Ch Co JC
Golden marguerite	<i>Anthemis tinctoria</i>	2-3'	yellow	summer	tolerates poor, dry soil, doesn't like humidity or heat, cut back heavily after flowering Ch
Swamp milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	3'	mauve, pink or white	spring to early summer	native, adapts to drier conditions Ch J JC SofC
New England aster	<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	4-6'	many	late summer to fall	native, support or pinch back, harvest- ing can cause rash Ch J JC PD SSE
New York aster	<i>Aster novi-belgii</i>	1-6'	many	late summer to fall	native, support or pinch back Ch
Astrantia	<i>Astrantia major</i>	2-3'	cream/pink pink & red cultivars	late spring to summer	part shade ok, likes organic matter and moisture, 10-14 d as cut flower Ch JC
Bluebeard	<i>Caryopteris x clandonensis</i>	3-4'	blue	late summer to fall	shrub, cut back hard in late winter JC PD
Common bluebeard	<i>Caryopteris incana</i>	3-5'	violet-blue or white	late summer	shrub, cut back hard in late winter, may dieback in zone 6, drought tolerant Ch
Leopard's bane	<i>Doronicum orientale</i> var. <i>magnificum</i> [may be listed as <i>D. caucasicum</i>] 'Finesse' (ok from seed)	1-2'	yellow	early to mid-spring	part shade in hot locations, water during drought, zone 4-7 (not heat tolerant - may go summer dormant) Ch
Coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i> 'White Swan'	2-3'	red/purple & white	July to September	native, part shade ok, drought tolerant, sow in fall (or cold stratify), the flowers of the straight species droop & look wilted, plants may be short- lived Ch J PD PV SofC S SSE T
Small globe thistle	<i>Echinops ritro</i>	3-4'	dark blue	June to August	spiny foliage, can dry flowers, ok on poor & dry soil Ch
Bluetop sea holly	<i>Eryngium alpinum</i> 'Blue Star', 'Superbum'	1-2'	blue	midsummer	spiny, 14 days as cut flower, ok on poor & dry soil, difficult to germinate Ch JC
Sea holly	<i>Eryngium amethystinum</i>	1½-2'	blue	midsummer	spiny, ok on poor & dry soil, difficult to germinate, can dry flowers Ch
Flat sea holly	<i>Eryngium planum</i> 'Blaukappe'	2-3'	blue	midsummer	spiny, ok on poor & dry soil, difficult to germinate Ch J JC
Eryngium	<i>Eryngium x tripartitum</i>	3½ -4'	blue	midsummer	spiny, ok on poor & dry soil, difficult to germinate Ch JC

Blanket flower	<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>	3'	yellow/red	summer	plants sprawl, good in hot & dry conditions, long-blooming, flowers close at night Ch T
Blanket flower conditions,	<i>Gaillardia x grandiflora</i> 'Golden Goblin' (blooms first year from seed, yellow) [may be listed as <i>Gaillardia aristata</i>]	2-3'	yellow/red	summer	plants sprawl, good in hot & dry long flowering season, plants are short-lived but self-seed Ch JC SofC
Baby's breath	<i>Gypsophila paniculata</i>	2-3'	white or pink	summer	likes alkaline soil, filler, taprooted Ch J JC SofC
Sneezeweed	<i>Helenium perennis</i>	3-5'	yellow, orange, red, mahogany	midsummer to frost	likes lean, moist soil, cut back hard by June, needs support, cut back by 1/3 after flowering Ch JC
Jasione	<i>Jasione perennis</i> 'Blue Light'	2'	blue	June on	blooms 1 st year from seed, part shade ok Ch
Lavender	<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>	2-3'	white, pink, lavender	summer	can dry flowers, prune to 6-8" in spring, low germination rate, slow grower CO J JC PV S SofC T
Lavender	<i>Lavandula x intermedia</i> 'Dilly Dilly'	2-3'	purple and white	summer	drought tolerant, can dry flowers, shrubby JC S
Liatris	<i>Liatris</i> spp.	1-6'	purple, mauve, rose-purple, white	mid to late summer	native, prefers moist soils – especially <i>L. spicata</i> , can dry flowers Ch JC PD
Sea lavender	<i>Limonium gerberi</i> [may be listed as <i>L. latifolium</i>]	3'	lavender	summer	can dry flowers Ch J
Bee balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i> 'Panorama' series (ok from seed)	2-4'	many	summer	native, needs moisture retentive soil, can be invasive, divide every 2-3 years, suitability as a cutflower varies by cultivar Ch J S
Catmint	<i>Nepeta catarica</i>	2-4'	lavender	summer	part shade ok, drought tolerant, cut back hard after flowering for second bloom, filler Ch J PV SofC SSE T
Oregano	<i>Origanum laevigatum</i>	1½-2'	pink/purple	late summer	hardy only to zone 6/7, drought tolerant, may sprawl Ch
Wild marjoram	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	1-3'	pink/purple	mid to late summer	likes alkaline soil, for culinary oregano use vegetatively propagated plants J PV
Penstemon	<i>Penstemon barbatus</i>	1½ -3'	many	late spring to mid-summer	native Ch J JC
Russian sage	<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>	3-5'	blue/purple	summer	tolerates drought, aromatic foliage, can be dried, long-blooming Ch JC PD T

Balloon flower	<i>Platycodon grandiflorus</i> 'Florist Blue'	2½' - 3½'	blue	mid to late summer	part shade ok, doesn't like wet soil, slow to emerge in spring, sear stems to prolong vase life, needs support, taprooted Ch JC SofC
Spiked speedwell	<i>Pseudolysimachion spicatum</i> [probably listed as <i>Veronica spicata</i>]	1-3'	white, pink, red & blue	late spring to midsummer	deadhead for repeat bloom, flowers for 4-7 weeks Ch J JC PV
Pincushion flower	<i>Scabiosa caucasica</i> House hybrids	1½' -2'	blue to purple	summer	likes neutral pH, mulch in summer, slow-grower Ch JC
Cream scabious	<i>Scabiosa ochroleuca</i>	2-3'	yellow	summer	short-lived but self-seeds Ch
Devil's bit scabious	<i>Scabiosa succisa</i> [may be listed as <i>S. pratensis</i>]	1-2½'	dark blue/purple	summer to fall	small flowers Ch
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago canadensis</i> 'Golden Baby' (ok from seed) (2')	2-6'	yellow	midsummer to fall	native, part shade ok, don't fertilize, divide every 2-3 years Ch JC PD
Tansy	<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>	2-4'	yellow	mid to late summer	spreads aggressively by rhizomes, site carefully, part shade ok, can use leaves in potpourri Ch
Tall verbena	<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>	3-4'	rose-violet	summer to fall	hardy to zone 6 but reseeds readily Ch Co J PD S
New York ironweed	<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>	3-7'	violet-purple	late summer to fall	native, cut back hard 1 month after emergence to increase flowers, likes moist soil Ch

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Corn cockle	<i>Agrostemma githago</i> 'Milas' series	2-3'	pink, white, red-purple	May – July	poisonous seed can contaminate grain crops, drought tolerant Ch Co PV SofC
Safflower	<i>Carthamus tinctorius</i>	1-6'	orange or yellow (sometimes red or white)	mid-summer	deep taproot, strong, upright grower, drought tolerant, can dry flowers, spiny leaves Ch SofC
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>	5-6'	white, pink, purple	summer	short vase life Ch Co J PV S SofC SSE T
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos sulphureus</i>	1½'-3'	yellow & orange	summer	drought tolerant Ch J PV S SofC SSE T

Sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</i> 'Holiday', 'Sonja', 'Autumn Beauty'	2-10'	many	summer	native, drought tolerant Ch Co J PV S SofC SSE T
Love-in-a-mist	<i>Nigella damascena</i>	1½ -2'	white, pink, blue, purple	summer	can dry flowers and seedpods Ch Co J PV S SofC SSE T
Mexican marigold	<i>Tagetes minuta</i>	7-10'	yellow	late summer/ fall	small flowers, use as filler, on noxious weed list in California Ch SofC
Mexican sunflower	<i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i> 'Torch' (4-6')	2 ½ -6'	red/orange	summer	drought tolerant, sear stems to prolong vase life Ch Co J PV S SSE T
Trachelium	<i>Trachelium caeruleum</i>	2 ½-3'	white or violet	summer	it's a tender perennial, can use as annual Ch
Zinnia	<i>Zinnia</i> species & hybrids 'Pastel Dreams', 'Blue Point', 'County Fair'	1-4'	many	summer	use single flowered types, susceptible to leaf scorch & mildew CH Co J S PV SofC SSE T

For additional cultural information see:

Armitage, A.M. Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes. 2nd edition. 1989. Stipes Publishing L.L.C., Champaign, IL.

Enterprise Guide for Southern Maryland: Producing Cut Flowers – Liatris. Fact Sheet 467. Cooperative Extension Service. U. of MD.

Producing Annual Sunflowers as Cut Flowers. Fact Sheet 686. Cooperative Extension Service. U. of MD.

Production of Alliums as Cut Flowers. Fact Sheet 767. Cooperative Extension Service. U. of MD.

Production of Purple Coneflower as a Cut Flower. Fact Sheet 731. Cooperative Extension Service. U. of MD.

Production of Yarrows as Cut Flowers. Fact Sheet 685. Cooperative Extension Service. U. of MD.

Sustainable Cut Flower Production. 2000. 21 p. (this publication can be obtained free from ATTRA, download from www.attra.org/attra-pub/farmscape.html or call 1-800-346-9140.)

Copies of Maryland Cooperative Extension publications can be obtained online from: www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/Publications/Category.cfm?ID=5

Note: Please disregard information about using pesticides in the above Cooperative Extension publications. Beneficial insect habitat should be pesticide-free.

For additional information on native pollinators see:

Alternative Pollinators: Native Bees. 1999. 20 p. (this publication can be obtained free from ATTRA, download from www.attra.org/attra-pub/farmscape.html or call 1-800-346-9140.)

Batra, S.W.T. 1984. Solitary Bees. Scientific American 250(2):120-127.

Bee Biology and Systematics Laboratory, Agricultural Research Service, USDA website: www.loganbeelab.usu.edu/

Bosch, J. & W. Kemp. 2000. How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee. Sustainable Agriculture Publications, Burlington, VT. \$9.95 + 3.95 S&H

Griffin, B.L. 1997. Humblebee Bumblebee. Knox Cellars Publishing, Bellingham, WA \$12.

Seed and plant sources:

Ch – Chiltern Seeds www.chilternseeds.co.uk. 44-1229-581137 (United Kingdom) This catalog identifies bee plants with a bee icon.

The website has a search function that will pull up a list of bee plants from the catalog.

Co – Cook's Garden www.cooksgarden.com 1-800-457-9703

J – Johnny's Select Seeds www.johnnyseeds.com 1-207-437-4301

JC – Joy Creek Nursery www.joycreek.com 1-503-543-7474 (plants)

PD – Plant Delights Nursery www.plantdelights.com 1-919-772-4794 (plants)

PV – Peaceful Valley Farm Supply www.groworganic.com 1-888-784-1722

S – Shepherd's Garden Seeds www.shepherdseeds.com 1-860-482-3638

SofC - Seeds of Change www.seedsofchange.com 1-888-762-7333

SSE – Seed Savers Exchange www.seedsavers.org 1-563-382-5990

T – Territorial Seed Company www.territorialseed.com 1-541-942-9547

(Note – source shown may sell a cultivar with unknown pollinator qualities)

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