

How to Plant a Garden for Pollinators

Choosing Plants for Pollinators

Select plants that flower because pollinators are looking for pollen and nectar. Mix in some grasses, ferns, and less showy flowers too – they provide resources for some pollinators like butterfly larvae, and they provide places for pollinators to nest or overwinter.

Native, Invasive,
Exotic, Noxious,
Oh My!

Choosing plants for pollinators does not have to be complicated, but it helps to know commonly used terms, the different types of plants available to you, which plants to prioritize, and which to avoid.

These Non-Native Plants Should NOT Be Planted

It is important to consult your local Extension Office or Invasive Species Council to make sure the plants you are using are not designated invasive or noxious in your region.

Native Plants

Plants that are a part of the natural environment of a region. Native plants, and their pollinators, have coevolved over thousands of years in a particular location. Selecting plants native to your region will provide the most benefit to pollinators and the environment.

Non-Native Plants

Plants that are not historically part of a region. They arrived in the region either intentionally or accidentally by humans or some other means. Other terms used for non-native plants include exotic, introduced, alien, and non-indigenous. Some non-natives are beautiful ornamentals and some provide resources for pollinators. There are a number of different types of non-native plants and some should never be intentionally planted.

Non-Invasive Plants

A plant that originated in a different location and is not historically part of an ecosystem BUT it does not reproduce on its own and does not spread or outcompete native plants. These plants are fine to plant in your garden.

Invasive Plants

A plant that is not native to the region and reproduces freely on its own. They invade natural or disturbed areas, outcompete native plants, and disrupt the ecosystem. Many seed mixes and plants sold at garden centers include species that are invasive in regions where they are marketed. Check species lists with local authorities and invasive species lists, and do not use if they are invasive.

Noxious Weeds

A plant that is particularly troublesome for agriculture, the environment, or public health. Noxious weeds should never be planted and some are illegal to plant in certain areas. Check noxious weed lists (e.g. <https://plants.usda.gov/java/noxComposite>) to find out what species are prohibited in your area.



Trees & Shrubs

While planting wildflowers is great for bees, butterflies and moths, don't overlook shrubs and trees! Many flowering shrubs and trees, such as maples, cherries, and willows, provide resources for pollinators. Oak trees are known to support over 500 butterfly and moth species! Check the resources at the back of this brochure to see what wild flowers, shrubs, and trees support pollinators in your region.