

A close-up photograph of a bumblebee on a purple flower with a bright orange center. The bee is positioned on the left side of the flower, facing right. The flower's petals are a vibrant purple, and the center is a dense cluster of bright orange and red stamens. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting foliage.

Bee-loved Garden Flowers

G. Edwin Varner

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Preface

This ebook is about growing the best seasonal flower garden plants that attract bees. It is based on which flowers provide abundant nectar and pollen. For bees, these two dietary substances offer all the nutrition for their survival. By obtaining these “goodies,” they cross-pollinate flowers that produce seeds and fruits that are important for our food supply and economic stability.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their growing conditions and hardiness. Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and my recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued, or replaced for better varieties by nurseries.

The following plants use their Latin name first, then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, garden centers, public gardens, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

This informative and entertaining eBook describes some of the best seasonal garden flowers that provide abundant nectar and pollen to attract pollinating bees.

The question of why you should attract bees is logical since your primary consideration is to grow beautiful flowers. Our common honey bee, bumblebee, and solitary bee populations are rapidly declining worldwide. There are plenty of speculations about the causes of this decrease but with few solutions.

These insects are vital for essential pollination services for our garden flowers, fruit, and vegetable crops. Will our flower gardens help ease this decline? In a small way, yes — but a united effort of many small gardens acting together each year will make a promising difference in the survival of all bees. They are worth the effort, even if they sting!

This eBook identifies and describes several beautiful bee-friendly flowers for continuous spring-to-fall blooming, ensuring a constant visitation of several pollinating bees to your flower and vegetable gardens.

Please learn not to think, “*Why should I care about bees?*” Instead, ask, “*How can I help them?*” This publication will explain why you must care, suggest which plants to grow, and perform essential practices to help your neighborhood bees thrive and survive.

To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Spring Blooming Flowers

This time of the year is a make-or-break season for all bees. Spring is not only a wake-up time for trees and flowers but also for these insects. Finding any blooming blossom with fresh nectar and plentiful pollen is of immediate importance for bumblebees and newly emerged solitary bees. Honey bees' larder of stored honey in their combs grows less each day and needs replenishment. That task becomes complicated with alternating warm and cold, dry and excessive rainy or snowy days, which places great stress on them.

Fortunately, there are life-sustaining blossoms available for the bees, but several are ephemeral — lasting for a short time only. The more spring garden flowers in bloom and extended over a few months, the better to help these bees hold out until the floral abundance of summer.

Your location and bloom time may differ depending on the growing zone, but most of the following springtime plants will be a great addition to help feed your newly awakened neighborhood bees.

Several of the following plants are bulbs that need to be planted in the fall so that they will bloom now. Please visit public gardens (or a friend's or relative's garden) to see the following blooming bulbs. Not all spring bulbs attract bees, such as tulips and daffodils. The following ones do — with the feverish activity of visiting bees. Plant several of these bulbs for the best “bee-utiful” results!

Allium - Flowering Onion



Allium aflatunense – Please think of this bulb as a giant growing and blooming version of our vegetable garden onion. Depending on the variety available, the sturdy flower stalk (botanically called the inflorescence) grows from under two feet to nearly three feet tall. It forms an enormous ball (also referred to as an orb or globe for greater effect) of gorgeous purple, white or creamy-lavender star-shaped florets.

You will notice the onion smell if you handle any part of this plant. This is not a bad thing, for this smell (and taste) repels squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, and, especially, deer.

This plant is a life savior for bees when it blooms early to mid-spring. From these individual blossoms, plenty of vital nectar and pollen are

available for these insects.

Blooming lasts, weather permitting, up to an entire month. Afterward, the flower head slowly dries (along with the enclosed black seeds), which still looks attractive in your garden. For additional “functionality,” you can also cut the flower stalk for indoor displays, but for our purpose here, leave the flowers in the garden to feed the bees. They will appreciate it more than you.

Plant the fall offered bulbs in a sunny to a partially sunny location in well-drained soil. Different species and varieties are available depending on flower color and stalk size. Look for the popular *Allium aflatunense* ‘**Purple Sensation**’ with large, stunning purple globes packed with several small flowers. Each sphere looks like a blue planet suspended in your garden. Make sure to plant several this fall to get the “fully stunning” effect of color and floral size. The bees will appreciate it!

Cercis – Eastern Redbud



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Cercis canadensis – It is not only the fruit trees and shrubs that provide plenty of nectar and pollen for hungry native bees but some of our loveliest decorative trees. One, in particular, is the **Eastern Redbud** with its gorgeous pinkish-purple clustered blossoms. They have the great potential to cover every twig and branch that grew the previous summer for almost two weeks.

Arborists classify this as an understory tree (hardy to zones 4 to 8) for it does not get excessively tall — a well-grown size would be nearly 30 feet — but can accommodate any garden or lawn setting. It is an impressive member of the pea-bean family. The structure of the flowers and the flattened pods containing small bean-shaped seeds are a dead

giveaway. Native to the eastern regions of North America from southern Ontario down to Texas, it impressed Oklahoma that the legislature voted it the official state tree. Oklahoma — you are OK, in my opinion, with this decision!

Redbuds are fast-growing and become an impressive branching tree within 10 years. It prefers to grow in sunny to partly shady locations in well-drained, fertile soil. Its only fault is that a late frost can play havoc with a potentially outstanding display, but that is only sometimes the case.

Because of its popularity as an excellent springtime bloomer, breeders have developed varieties highlighting certain colorful features. For example, a few types have yellowish mature leaves or white to deeper pink or purple blossoms. I want a variety to produce longer blooming or develop deeper yellow leaves in the fall. For now, let's appreciate the stunning beauty and the gift of nutritional sustenance for our bees from this magnificent tree.

Crocus



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Crocus tommasinianus – For most cold-climate-living people, including myself, spring has finally arrived when the first crocus blossoms emerge from the cold ground and burst into bloom. For bees, especially honey bees, these flowers are a godsend. I am unsure if crocus provides enough nectar, but I have noticed plenty of brilliant yellow packets of pollen clinging to their hind legs.

Usually, instead of a solitary honey bee visiting a flower, there may be a few more bees competing for the pollen. Could they be bees from different colonies competing for this same resource? Possibly, but inside a crocus blossom, it's a free-for-all competition for every grain of

nourishing pollen. For the crocus bulb, all this rummaging around for its and other bulbs' pollen guarantees cross-pollination will happen.

You must plant crocus bulbs in the fall, preferably in large clusters in beds, borders, or lawns. Insert the corms four to six inches in the ground, cover them up, add an inch of mulch, and then wait until early spring. Most garden centers will have bags of these corms — usually sold in mixed colors. Specialty nurseries also offer separate colors.

Make sure your croci (or is the plural called “crocuses”?) grow in full to partial sunlight. They bloom well long before other perennials emerge from the ground. If planted in lawns, be careful not to mow until the crocus leaves turn brown. This signal they are beginning dormancy. If planted in a flower garden, create a visual boundary area with sticks to prevent the bulbs from being dug up while transplanting annuals or later plantings of perennials.

Most crocus species are hardy in zones 3 to 8, thrive in well-drained, fertile soil, and in full to partly sunny areas. Try to get and grow *Crocus tommasinianus* varieties for their gorgeous blue to purple coloration (some with attractive striping within the petals.) The bright yellow pollen-laden stamens attract the bees and your eyes. What a great way to celebrate the arrival of spring!

As the years pass, your initial investment in bulbs and planting will reward you and your neighborhood bees with a windfall of ever-expanding colonies or drifts of blooming bulbs.

Eranthis – Winter Aconite



Eranthis hyemalis – If you think Crocus flowers are the first harbingers of spring, well, think again. This tuberous perennial, with its vivid yellow buttercup-like blossoms, will pop up above the snow weeks before Crocus awakens. Resembling buttercups — which this plant is related to — the flowers are an essential food resource for all awakening and early commuting bees.

Like buttercups, you can easily see the extensive amount of pollen from the many stamens, but a question remains as if nectar is available. From countless observations of visiting honey bees by beekeepers, each blossom may provide some well-needed sweet nourishment.

Native to Asia and central to northern Europe, *Eranthis* has also become established throughout North America by extensive fall plantings of

their bulbs and become naturalized quickly by the resultant self-sown seeds.

The small tubers (growing less than six inches tall) are hardy from zones 3 to 7 and easily tucked underground (about three inches deep) in any garden setting — in beds, borders, under shrubs and trees, and rock gardens. They will thrive for years in sunny, well-drained, fertile soil areas.

You can get these tubers from your local garden nursery or online specialty bulb nurseries.

Erica and Calluna – Heath and Heather



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Erica carnea*; *Calluna vulgaris – We have ventured into a conundrum of “who and what” these small-growing, spreading, hardy (zones 4 to 7), evergreen, woody shrubs are for a typical garden. They seem related but can be confusing to associate with many gardeners. Well, no matter, for they all attract bees by the thousands. The small bee-head-sized blossoms become saturated with nectar (along with plenty of pollen for seed-making).

The *Erica* or Heath varieties are of particular importance. Well-established plants will attract springtime bees with “buckets” of “high-octane” nectar. It is not unusual to hear the buzzing of hundreds of large and small bees to quench their energetic needs.

Some Heath species bloom throughout winter in moderate zones when bees are able, on warmer days, to visit the flowers. Heather will bloom later in the summer to early spring — obviously to the delight of last-minute and “early bird” foraging bees.

Flower colors of both genera will range from white, pink, and rose to gorgeous purple shades depending on the variety.

All these plants prefer to grow in well-drained, fertile, but acidic soil in as much sunlight as possible. Be careful when planting since this acid soil requirement can play havoc with other flowering plants which dislike this low-pH soil.

Galanthus – Snowdrops



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Galanthus nivalis – These nodding or drooping white blossoms are like candy for any early spring-awakening bee. The pristine white tubular flowers hang downward, but that does not interfere with the bees climbing inward to partake in the sweet nectar and some pollen.

Galanthus is ideal for planting its small bulbs in partially shady, humus-damp soil locations either in an open area or under shade trees. It should receive plenty of sunlight in the early spring, but the leaves appreciate later protection from harsher sun exposure, and the trees leafing out provides this protection.

Snowdrops are incredibly hardy and can survive in zones 3 to 7.

Hamamelis – Witch Hazel



Hamamelis vernalis; virginiana; mollis; japonica and ***x intermedia*** – Witch Hazel is a large deciduous shrub (up to 20 feet tall when old) with colorful, sweetly fragrant flowers during the winter and into the early spring. For early awakening small native bees, this shrub will provide them with sticky pollen and, I suspect, plenty of nectar for their “sugar fix.”

It is hardy to zones 3-9, but some significant considerations are at play when choosing a variety for your garden. First, the plant requires winter cold to bloom. Without this chill period, most species and cultivars may not produce flowers. So, it would be best if you visited your local garden center to find those candidates that will thrive well in your area or climate.

Based on that visit, the second consideration is choosing fragrant ones. One recommended cultivar, *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena,' is one of the best types available, having intensely aromatic orange and red flowers.

In early February, people and groundhogs are eager to determine when spring will arrive. These shrubs will bloom when days are sunny with a hint of warmth. If you think these plants have “mental health issues,” I agree. Who needs a prognosticating groundhog when you have Witch Hazel flowers to see and smell?

Yes, the wavy petals look like they went through a paper shredder. But there they are, blooming among the snow-covered branches. The petals are bright yellow to orange and even brick-red depending on the species and hybrids. The hybrid varieties display variations of these colors and degrees of scent. Most types bloom well for several weeks

Witch Hazel will grow well in part shade, but additional sunshine will produce more blooming power. Avoid growing in dense shade and dry soil locations. Once established, they are trouble-free.

Hellebore – Lenten Rose



Helleborus orientalis; *Helleborus foetidus* and *Helleborus x hybridus*
– While we look outside from our warm homes to a snow-covered garden, bleak with no apparent signs of spring, we do not observe what is happening under the snowdrifts. You may think our ordinary spring crocus bulbs set the pace for sprinting to early spring blooming, but no, this plant has a two-month head start.

This perennial (zones 4 to 9) slowly inches its stems and blossoms out of the snow. It has evergreen leaves, and some remain — worse for wear — during the winter, but fresh new leaves will also slowly emerge with the flower stalks.

Its common name is **Lenten Rose**, a member of the Buttercup family, not roses. Lenten is also a reference to the Christian season of Lent.

This plant blooms during this time — give or take a week or two. While most Northern Hemisphere garden plants are dormant, this plant springs to life even in January and continues to grow and bloom into May.

A perplexing question is why these plants bloom now. Hellebores are native to Southeastern Europe, especially in the valleys of the Balkan Mountains. In these areas, the conditions are more favorable for early blooming. The *Helleborus foetidus* flowers face downward, pollinated by crawling insects (such as beetles or pre-flight flies) and even small animals such as mice. Most bees cannot fly since the air temperatures are too cold, but some do when the air warms. For them, these flowers are a critical resource for nectar and pollen.

Hellebores are great for planting in semi-shady locations. Like many early spring blooming bulbs and perennials, this plant loves the early spring sunshine but can't tolerate the intense sunlight and heat as the season transforms into summer.

The flower colors range from chartreuse green, pale yellow, pale lavender, and some reddish-pink added for additional pizzazz. Virtually all the blossoms have contrasting spots, veins, or streaks. Please understand these flowers are not incredibly vibrant, and the pale yellow and green varieties blend in with the dark green leaves.

Most mature plants will grow to almost a foot tall and wide but eventually form larger clumps or colonies over many years. Besides being raised in part shade, these plants also need well-drained, fertile, moist soil. Adding lime will also help in better growth and development.

Being a hardy evergreen, trim or remove the older leaves before the onslaught of winter. The removal of them helps the development of new leaves and flowers. It also makes the garden look tidier.

Over the past decade, a massive interest has been in creating new colorful varieties. You can discover many of them in larger garden centers and online nurseries. Sadly, the plants can be pricey, for it takes

time to develop saleable blooming plants. Seed-grown plants are not reliably colorful and can take over three years to bloom. Well, think of it this way — if you don't plant them now, you have wasted another year not enjoying them and helping your hungry neighborhood bees.

Hyacinthoides – English Bluebell



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Hyacinthoides non-scripta – These fall-planted bulbs (hardy from zones 4 to 8) appreciate dappled sunlight and moist woodsy soil. Over considerable time, they will produce a naturalized, ever-expanding carpet of intense blue (or white) tubular to bell-shaped blossoms covering a woodland.

This extensive carpeting effect will only happen in your life if you speed things along by purchasing and planting millions of bulbs but think of it as a gift to future generations. For our immediate plans, plant several near the base of a few trees or in your garden.

A closely related species, *Hyacinthoides hispanica* or Spanish Bluebells, is also available and similarly grows and blooms like the English

Bluebells but does not have a fragrance like the English Bluebell.

The flowers of both species go dormant by early summer when the tree leaves shade them. Their exceptional blossoms draw your attention and the early awakening native bees searching for pollen and energetic nectar.

Muscari – Grape Hyacinth



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Muscari armeniacum – These spring-blooming bulbous plants are less immediate attention-getters than Narcissus, daffodils, and tulips. Unlike those bulbs, Grape Hyacinths is, when grown in abundance, an excellent addition to attract hungry native small bees looking for a meal.

Each tiny purple blossom may go unnoticed by our eyes, but to a little bee, it is big enough to slip a small head and tongue into for a quick slurp of nectar and a headful of pollen. For the bee, it is vital nourishment and, for each flower, successful pollination.

For those unfamiliar with this bulb, it is not a small variation of the similar-named bulbs called **Hyacinths**, which are larger but also sport

massive and highly fragrant flower stalks. They, too, can supply bees with some nectar and pollen.

Like most spring-blooming bulbs, these plants grow well in sunny to partly sunny locations and in well-drained, fertile soil. Their hardiness is from zones 4 to 8 or 3 to 9 in more protected areas. Please allow the leaves to turn brown, showing they are now dormant, before cutting back. You can purchase these small bulbs in garden centers or online nurseries in the fall.

Prunus and Malus – Fruit Trees (Cherry, Plum, Peach, and Apple)



Prunus species; *Malus* species – No matter where you live, a fruit tree will grow near you — be it a wild or “domesticated” hybridized version. We characterize the *Prunus* group (like cherries) as having fleshy drupes, stone fruit, or a basic “pit” with an enclosed seed. *Malus* has an unmistakable fleshy apple or pear appearance.

All that matters for a bee’s needs is the blossoms bloom in the spring (usually in mid to late spring) to provide plenty of nectar and pollen. Besides the blossoms’ sheer beauty and fragrance, the successful pollination and the yummy fruit development during the summer suit our needs.

Hardiness for most fruit trees is from zones 3 to 8, but that depends on your climate. Apple trees are very hardy and reliable in providing fruit in colder locations. Cherries and peach trees are more temperamental and can suffer in severely cold climates. Make sure to plant these trees in well-drained, fertile soil and sunny locations. Nurseries and garden centers will provide the best selections for growing in your area.

Salix – Pussy Willow



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Salix discolor*, *S. caprea*, *S. cinera – If you wish for an early spring blooming shrub that attracts a child’s fascination, you can’t go wrong in growing this in a garden. Those delightful furry or fuzzy gray catkins are the early developing condensed pollen-laden stamens. Male plants only produced these fuzzy catkins for *Salix* trees are dioecious — having separate male or female plants. When young, these catkins look like a kitten’s paw or a rabbit’s foot.

Okay. That’s for our enjoyment, but a bee must wait until the catkin matures and exhausts extensive quantities of pollen. At this time, the bee can get plenty to be used as food for the developing larva. The

catkins also produce nectar to attract these bees and some flies. This makes sense to provide an enticement for the pollination service.

Pussy Willows (as well as other willow shrubs and trees) propagate quickly by cutting young branches and inserting them into moist ground. Here, they will soon establish a root system and grow. Be careful, for all *Salix* can grow too quickly and form extensive side-growths and upright branches.

Most species and varieties are hardy from zones 4 (even lower) to 8.

Taraxacum – Dandelion



Taraxacum officinale – Who could find fault with this remarkable plant? Modern homeowners who own extensive green lawns, that's who. From a historical perspective, people did not consider dandelions as weeds until they grew on a thick, grassy lawn. I am not sure if this is a similar worldwide complaint. Still, Americans react with disdain seeing many yellow flowers popping up all over their large green lawns and flower beds from mid to late spring.

No matter how many broadleaf herbicide applications or how short the lawnmower blades are sliced through the grass, this plant, and its abundant progeny, keep reappearing. Maybe that is a good thing, for these brilliant yellow "flowers" are essential to help feed our native bees throughout the spring and early summer.

Dandelions have tiny flowers collected together into a composite flower head. This is no surprise since they are part of the extensive ensemble of plants in the Daisy Family.

Most botanists theorize these plants originated in Europe but are still determining their exact location before humans began spreading them willy-nilly here and there. No matter where it considers its “homeland,” Dandelions may be the most successful plant in colonizing almost the entire planet. It now occupies all continents except Antarctica — give a few more years of climate change, and we’ll see those yellow heads popping up in newly exposed patches of soil. That’s a lame joke, but who knows? If it does happen, they will be a welcomed source of nectar and pollen for any bees that find their way there.

Embrace the dandelion growing on your lawn. Enjoy the beautiful yellow blossoms in a sea of green grass and blue sky. If you see a bee or two rummaging within the petals, swallow your pride and rejoice you are helping these little insects.

Summer Blooming Flowers

This season provides a cornucopia of flowers providing plenty of nectar and pollen for all solitary and colony-living bees. It does not matter what type of flower is in bloom; it will attract them, and they will partake in whatever nourishment each blossom offers.

With so many wild and garden flowers available, how can we narrow down which plants to grow? A piece of good advice is to grow or purchase those flowers that keep their “wildness” in their display. This means cultivating the species or non-hybrid varieties that are less flamboyant or have excessive petals. Although they appeal to our eyes, double-petaled (or multi-petaled) hybrid flowers are not particularly attractive to bees and butterflies.

Single-petaled flowers — especially wildflowers and heirloom varieties — offer plenty of protein-enriched pollen and high-caloric nectar. The genetic construction of additional petals results in a loss of pollen-laden stamens and, surprisingly, nectar. Bees will search among the many petals for nourishment but eventually give up; it’s a time and energy-consuming endeavor with little reward.

With this in mind, throughout the summer months, one type of single-petal flower construction our buzzy friends relish in visiting. This flower style belongs to the Composite or Aster Family, which includes, obviously - Asters, Daisies, Dahlias, Black-Eyed-Susan, Cosmos, Sunflowers, and a host of other representatives. Their flattened disk-shaped blossoms provide a welcoming landing platform to gather pollen and drink nectar easily.

Listed below are various summer-blooming plants, including several composite flowers, that are easy to grow and quick to bloom for all summer enjoyment — both for us, the bees, and the butterflies. Most are annuals, but there are several that are hardy perennials. Make sure to grow several types for all summer availability and easy accessibility for all bees.

Achillea – Yarrow



Achillea filipendulina – This hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) works best in an informal flower bed, such as one devoted to wildflowers. Bees, especially the small solitary ones, will be delighted with the unlimited availability of tiny colorful florets to gather pollen and sip up the nectar.

Breeders have created colorful varieties with less aggressive, weedy growth habits of wild plants. The colors of the “flattened” flower clusters (called corymbs) range from white, pink, rose, red, or bright yellow.

The attractive dark-green to silvery-white, serrated leaves are pungently herbal-scented. Hybrid types have proven to be great for growing in perennial flower beds, for they grow less lofty and are bushy.

As members of the Aster family, most plants can grow to three feet tall or more, depending on soil fertility. Most varieties bloom all summer when planted in full sun and well-drained soil.

Alcea – Hollyhock



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Alcea rosea – A principal representative of the immense Mallow Family, Hollyhocks have grown in flower gardens for centuries. They grow tall, possibly overwhelming smaller gardens, but most can accommodate these enjoyable giants.

The whole plant is impressive, with flower spikes over eight feet tall. The blossoms may last one day (as usual for the Mallow family), but new flowers unfold each morning from early to mid-summer.

They are easy to raise from seed and command attention to show off to your friends and neighbors. They also command attention from our bees to the prodigious pollen produced from each large blossom. It is common to see honey bees and bumblebees wallowing in the center of

each flower, covered from head to hind claw in white or yellow pollen. The bee will eventually clean herself, pack the pollen into a ball, and secure it on the back legs to bring it back to her home.

Being a biennial, allow a few seeds to self-sow (or sow more yourself early in the summer) and allow the young plants to overwinter. They will regrow quickly in the spring, setting the stage for prolific summer blooming.

Seeds of colorful varieties or a mixture are available in many garden centers and online nurseries.

Antirrhinum – Snapdragon



Antirrhinum nanum – The flowers of this favorite annual provide easy, interactive enjoyment for children (and us childlike adults.) The “jaws” of the petals will snap shut when you open them with your fingers. It enthralled me, as a child, also seeing bumblebees struggle to open the petal jaws to climb into the floral throat, only to disappear and reappear as they emerge backward.

I dislike modern varieties, for breeders have made Snaps smaller and more “open-mouthed.” Instead of giant dragons, they are now little lizards. I suppose the bumblebees prefer this easy-access floral configuration without the energy expenditure struggle.

A few varieties raised today still have real dragon-size stature and some fragrance. The variety, **Lipstick Silver**, has red and white petals with a

sweet, clove perfume. Another fragrant one is **Royal Bride** with pure white flowers. Both types grow to almost three feet tall.

They all need to grow in plenty of sunlight, fertile soil, and some support stakes to keep them standing tall and proud—as any dragon should.

Borago – Borage or Starflower



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Borago officinalis – Remember the old saying, “happy as a kid in a candy store”? Welcome to the botanical candy store for many bees — especially honey bees. Each azure-blue, star-shaped blossom contains what may appear to any bee as a cup of nectar. Multiply this cup by several thousand flowers over the summer, and you can understand why this easy and fast-growing annual herb is any pollinator’s dream plant.

Although you can include this plant in a flower garden, gardeners have historically delegated it to the vegetable garden for these blue flowers, and leaves can be added to salads or steeped as tea. I have not indulged in its eat ability, but the flowers and young leaves apparently taste and

smell like cucumbers. But don't eat too many (especially the leaves), for they can become toxic. For centuries, the plant was used medicinally to cure several ailments, but I recommend contacting your GP doctor before undergoing self-medicating.

Speaking of cucumbers, this plant was (and still is advised) planted near vegetable plants to draw-in bees to help pollinate their blossoms. Hey, you can't beat a plant that produces a plethora of summer-blooming blue flowers, seeping mini-gallons of nectar, and adds colorful bling to boring salads. So, in the grand scheme of garden things, Borage is the ideal plant to satisfy bees and humans in any garden setting.

There are a few dissatisfying things about Borage. One disadvantage (for us) is these flowers hang downward, diminishing viewing their gorgeous blue color. To a bee, who cares as long as it produces plenty of nectar? This is paramount for honey bees, and pollen collection is secondary. For bumblebees, pollen is their primary focus.

Another disadvantage of growing Borage is it is messy to the point of becoming weedy. The plant becomes top-heavy with flowers and can flop this way and that. Later, with all this pollination, massive number of seeds are made by late summer. To be direct, pulling up these old plants is advised to prevent excessive seed dispersal.

Borage is commonly available in garden seed catalogs but is rarely sold as starter plants in garden centers. The plants grow best in full sun but partial shade in hot climates. Avoid overly fertile soil since this will make the plants even weedier and produce fewer flowers.

Calendula – Pot Marigold



Calendula officinalis – Marigold’s common name is confusing since gardeners call another but unrelated flower a Marigold (technically called *Tagetes*).

Calendula has several varieties, with flower colors ranging from bright yellows and vibrant oranges to mixed shades. Many bold-colored, double-petaled varieties are available as seeds, which are outstanding to view in a garden, but bees and butterflies prefer the single-petaled types. Here, they have better access to land on the outstretched outer ray petals and sip the plentiful nectar within the inner disc flowers.

Since the bees enjoy sampling these flowers, you may be unaware that the brightly colored petals are edible. This culinary usage explains the common nickname of Pot Marigold. Craft folks also use them as a dye to

add coloring to fabrics and as an application to skin lotions. Let's call this a multi-purpose plant for us and the bees.

The flowers bloom from early to midsummer until a killing frost. They will self-seed, and new plants will grow and flourish next year. They are low maintenance, but the occasional clipping of old flowers helps prevent excessive seed production. This will prompt more flowers to bloom during the summer. They will need plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil to grow well.

You can easily find single-petaled varieties in almost all seed catalogs and garden centers.

Ceratotheca – South African Foxglove



Ceratotheca triloba – Related to the earlier mentioned Snapdragons (*Antirrhinum*), this annual is native to South Africa and is hardy only in zones 9 to 10. This plant can grow to over six feet tall in a flower bed, but when grown in a large container, it will be half that size. The petals are pure white or a gorgeous soft lavender with violet nectar-guide stripes within the extended throat.

Although the enormous flowers resemble a snapdragon (without the snap-like petal jaw construction), you can receive plenty of cheap thrills watching burly bumblebees climb into the extended throat to suckle a draft of nectar.

Plant it in full to partial sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil to achieve maximum blooming. It is also drought tolerant, so you need not worry

about watering it if you are away for a prolonged time.

Imported as seeds into the United States in 1805, the plant never became well-known to American gardeners for some unexplained reason. In Victorian England, it became the rage in British gardening society and was later on... forgotten. Just like the adage, here today—gone tomorrow. Growing it must have been a 'fad,' and afterward, gardeners became obsessed with other flowers. Gardeners have a psychological condition called 'pretty flower syndrome,' similar to 'shiny object syndrome.' We always gravitate to the newest beautiful flowers to grow and enjoy.

You cannot find these plants in garden centers, but larger British seed companies will have seeds available. Don't worry; this plant is easy to grow from seed and raise to enjoy eye-catching, beautiful flowers and thirst bumblebees.

Coreopsis – Tickseed



Coreopsis tinctoria; *lanceolata*; and *verticillata* – Being a vibrant-colored member of the Aster family, it gets its unusual nickname of tickseed because its seeds resemble blood-engorged ticks. YIKES! The things people imagine are borderline disturbing. What is not distressing is the various species of bees attracted to the brilliantly colorful, pollen-enriched, and nectar-filled flowers. These attractive annual and perennial plants are easy to grow and, once established in your garden, become a no-fuss, problem-free attraction.

An old but still popular annual species is the *Coreopsis tinctoria* or the **Plains Coreopsis**. Native to the prairie areas of North America, it grows to over three feet and sports many eye-catching bright yellow daisies with brownish-red centers. You will always find new plants sprouting each spring from their self-sown seeds.

For a perennial species/variety having pure yellow single flowers with delicate green foliage, you can't go wrong planting *Coreopsis verticillata*. It grows shorter and bushier, is easy to grow, and makes excellent cut flowers from your garden. It, and other similar varieties, is hardy from zones 4 to 9.

Coreopsis will bloom all summer if planted in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. They dislike clay-based soils and prefer a more sandy or gravelly medium.

For your garden plants, always deadhead spent flowers to prevent excessive seed formation, which can "shut down" further flower production for the season.

You can purchase potted plants of these various hybrids in garden centers and seeds (including several species) in wildflower catalogs.

Cosmidium



Cosmidium burridgeanum – This is one of the new annual kids on the block, and only a little information is available for most gardeners. How about you get acquainted with this dynamo of a grower and a powerhouse of a bloomer?

This plant is a native Texas wildflower with no common name (yet), so we will use the Latin name. It is another member of the impressive Aster family with wiry stems and stunning displays of yellow-tipped with purple-red-brown centered Cosmos-like blossoms. I will type more about Cosmos in the next section. Planting several plants is ideal for bedding, rock gardens, and containers.

Cosmidium has an unprecedentedly powerful aroma of chocolate or cocoa. You can smell the intense chocolate fragrance from all the many

— and I mean A LOT — flowers. It is easy to grow from seeds sprinkled on flower beds and should appeal to children and all adult chocoholics. It also attracts all sorts of bees to this smorgasbord of pollen and nectar.

The plant produces so many flowers for the summer that it will wear itself out, especially while forming new seeds. For a little proactive maintenance, take the time to clip spent flowers back during the summer to encourage more blooming until a fall frost.

Individual plants can grow to about two feet tall and wide. Planting a large clump or group is more attractive and provides more chocolatey perfume for the garden.

Look for the variety called **Philippine** in published or online seed catalogs. It grows shorter and bushier than the typical species plant. You will not find this plant in garden centers, either as potted plants or in seed racks. It is “new” to the gardening public, and it takes time to catch up in becoming famous.

Cosmos



Cosmos bipinnatus*; *Cosmos sulphureus – A relative in the immense Aster family, Cosmos will reward you with a windfall of stunning ever-blooming flowers. You can include two species (with several varieties) of them in your garden. *Cosmos bipinnatus* (shown above) has white, pink, red, and many bicolors with contrasting or alternating striped petals. The hybrid varieties in this species grow a modest two to four feet tall but branch out quickly to fill an area. Most types display single petals, but semi to fully-double varieties are available. For best bee satisfaction, grow single-petaled varieties.

The other common species for your garden is *Cosmos sulphureus* is native to North America and, as the Latin name describes, has double to semi-double deep to bright golden sulfur-yellow blossoms. It can grow to over six feet tall, but cultivated varieties lower this height to a

welcomed two feet. As a native prairie plant, it is unsurpassed in adapting to drought and poor soil conditions.

To add bonus points, these plants can also easily tolerate general neglect, such as less watering and thriving in less fertile ground. As long as they grow in sunny areas and well-drained fertile soil, they bloom all summer and fall. If you pamper them with kindness — watch out — they will bloom themselves silly.

Your local garden center will have packets of seeds for you to purchase. For more colorful varieties, purchase from online seed nurseries.

Echinacea – Coneflower



Echinacea pallida; purpurea – Coneflowers derive their name from the Greek “echinos,” meaning “hedgehog” for its spiky center cone. Although the colorful petals steal the floral show, these bristly cones can have a lovely iridescence in the sunlight.

Something about these large flowers always attracts butterflies and plenty of “lost in thought” bumblebees. These bees constantly walk about these prickly blossoms and seem so engrossed, oblivious to what else is happening around them. Plenty of pollen becomes attached to their legs while they lap up nectar.

Coneflowers bloom in late June and continue all summer. They thrive in the scorching sun and dry soil and grow over two or three feet tall. They are one of your most hardy perennials thriving from zones 3 to 10.

Hybridizers or plant breeders discovered its exciting possibilities and improved an excellent plant colorfully. But here lies a problem if you wish to maximize attracting the neighborhood bees. Today's colorful varieties less resemble those grown in your great-grandmother's garden. Newer types, although looking fabulous, appeal less to these insects. For the best nutritional benefit of all bees, the wildflower species is ideal for them.

One theory is that excessive hybridization may limit or prevent nectar production compared to the original country wildflower types grown years ago. One interesting study compared newer hybrids with the species type and discovered that butterflies and bees gravitated to and remained on the species' Echinacea flowers more often.

If you plan to maximize having these pollinators in your garden, grow the wildflower species more so than current hybrid varieties. You can find the wildflower seeds in specialty catalogs. Garden centers may not sell them, for there is more sales appeal with the dazzling types.

Helenium – Sneezeweed



Helenium autumnale – Here is a gorgeous perennial: nothing to sneeze at in growing in your garden. Well, it can make you sneeze, but only if you dry the flower heads and pulverize them into a fine powder. The western Native Americans did this process, as well as the westward-ho pioneers. The common name they gave was called snuff.

For those who are not into stuffing narcotics into your nostrils, it is nothing like powdered cocaine. Historically, snuff was powdered tobacco, but a less-addictive generic plant was substituted when you can't have the real McCoy. Thus, this beautiful flowering plant was used. Your immediate impatient question is, "*What in blazes do bees have to do with all this snuff business?*" The answer is — nothing at all. I thought a little historical nonsense was in order.

Moving along, the original Sneezeweed flowers are bright yellow single-petaled “daisies.” Over the years, plant breeders (not under the influence of snuff) saw great potential in establishing several colorful varieties for home garden use — for eye appeal and not nose inhaling.

Helenium grows quickly from seed sown in spring and will develop into two to five-foot-tall bushy plants by fall. Throughout this time, depending on the variety, you will encounter masses of brightly colorful single to double “daisies,” attracting plenty of bees and butterflies of all sizes, colors, and species.

Make sure to grow your plants in plenty of sunshine and well-drained fertile soil. They make excellent companion plants for many other garden flowers, especially those related to the Composite family.

Nurseries offer several varieties as potted plants or seeds. One outstandingly colorful variety is ‘**Mardi Gras**,’ with young flower heads starting as yellow but aging to orange and then red. The central cone is dark brown (or black) with vibrant yellow stamens. No wonder why the bees and butterflies go crazy over visiting these flowers! It and most other colorful varieties are hardy from zones 4 to 8.

Helianthus – Sunflower



Helianthus annuus; *Helianthus maximiliani* and hybrids – Over the past few years, growing sunflowers have increased in popularity. Breeders have transformed our old farmyard sunflowers into multi-headed, multi-colorful varieties not envisioned years ago. This is a significant advancement, but problems are now being encountered.

When plants are “upgraded” to accent some specific trait, something else has to be “downgraded.” One example is the development of new pollen-less varieties. Breeders develop these varieties to tap into the cut-flower market. The common bright yellow sunflowers always drop pollen onto tables. Messy, but these new pollen-less types prevent constant clean-up.

Other “no pollen” varieties are the multi-petaled monstrosities that actually resemble the sun. One famous example is **Teddy Bear**, whose total diameter is stuffed with bright yellow petals. No bee will ever find her way into the center of that enormous sphere.

These outlandish no-pollen varieties may appear grand to some gardeners, but I feel sorry for the bees since they eat pollen for protein. I have seen them search in vain, trying to find some within these new sunflowers. For them, it is a terrible loss of energy that they could have used to find another source of pollen and nectar.

Let’s grow more old-fashion types and allow the honeybees and bumblebees to become dusted with pollen while sipping for nectar. For example, look at the above photo. Can you count the number of small social bees visiting this sunflower?

If you wish to view lots of bees and butterfly activity, you can also grow taller native perennial sunflowers such as *Helianthus maximiliani* or **Maximilian Sunflower**. You can find this and our “old-fashioned sunflowers” seeds in many seed catalogs — especially those specializing in wildflowers or heritage plants.

Herb Plants



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Basil, Catmint, Catnip, Chives, Cilantro, Comfrey, Fennel, Hyssop, Mint, Oregano, Rosemary, Sage, and Thyme – I grouped all these plants under the umbrella classification of herbs. We use them as food flavor enhancers, but smaller solitary bees appreciate the tiny flowers for obtaining pollen and nectar.

You may think there would be a short supply of these vital resources, but appearances are deceiving. Many of these herbs release an intense scent which may cause the bees to become more alert to their flowers.

Larger bumblebees may have trouble staying on the flower spikes because of their girth and weight (unless the plant stems are sturdy), but smaller bees like honey bees and solitary bees find the blossoms

are a perfect fit. Not only will the bees be busy, but many colorful butterflies will also partake in the feast.

The adage “the more, the merrier” aptly applies when growing these herbs. They have different bloom times, but most overlap, so these pollinators stay and sample all the goodness from each plant. That’s not a bad way to spend all those long summer days.

The general culture of all these plants includes growing in sunny locations with fertile, well-drained soil. Some grow tall and bushy, while others are short and stout. Research their mature dimensions before planting them in your herb garden for proper placement.

All garden centers and nurseries will have most of these plants available. I recommend purchasing potted plants for the woody plants. The herbaceous or non-woody types are easy and quick to grow from seed.

Lathyrus – Sweet Pea



Lathyrus odorata – Please forgive me when I change Hallmark’s trademarked signature slogan to “when you care to grow the very best,” for this treasured garden plant is grown for its gorgeous colors and wonderful perfume. In the language of flowers, sweet pea means “delicate pleasures,” and what pleasures they are!

I love floral history, so let’s begin with the facts on these favorite vines. Discovered by a Sicilian Monk named Father Francisco Cupani back in 1699 while touring the various areas around the Mediterranean, he collected seeds for friends in England and Holland. Imagine their surprise when the vines bloomed!

Out of honor of their friend, they named this strain after him. Today, **Cupani’s Original** is one of the most popular varieties grown in

gardens worldwide. The vines grow to well over eight feet tall and give an abundance of pink and reddish-purple blossoms, exuding that sweet perfume.

Over time, a significant number of varieties are available for gardeners. I would bore you silly (if not already) by listing even a fraction. Try to find **Cupani's Original** in online seed companies. Garden centers will only sell mixed colors of Sweet Pea.

Now, what about our bees? Well, they are not particularly attracted to these flowers, especially the smaller bees, for it is difficult for them to “open up” the thick petals. Our larger type of bumblebees has cleverly discovered a way to circumvent this problem by biting with their strong mandible mouthparts through the blossom's base to extract the nectar. They avoid going into the flower via the “front door” like any other bee but instead break in (or bite) sideways. Clever thieves, aren't they?

But the Sweet Pea flower still gets pollinated, for the weight of the bumblebee pushes slightly down on the keel petal, which causes the stamen and pistil to spring upward, plastering the legs and belly of the bee with pollen. The pistil becomes glued with a previous splashing of pollen from earlier pea flowers on the bee's abdomen. Mission accomplished with cross-pollination and a nectar and pollen meal for the bumblebee. The above photo shows the yellow pistil alongside the bee dusted with pollen.

I have seen this happen many times, so this is probably how Sweet Pea flowers get pollinated by this interesting and creative centrifuge by bumblebees. Plant some seeds this spring and see this fantastic activity for yourself. Many seed catalogs — especially online companies — offer several varieties of fragrant and colorful Sweet Peas to grow in your garden.

Lavandula – Lavender



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Lavandula angustifolia – Whether you consider lavender a hardy perennial, woody sub-shrub, or herb, bees consider it an excellent gastronomic resource. Butterflies also partake in this pleasure, but, in my experience, I usually see honey bees or small bumblebees foraging amongst the small blue-purple blossoms.

I am not sure if it is the flower's color or that delightful fragrance that lures them, but they become so entranced in search of nectar that they become unaware if you come face-to-face with them (if you are ever inclined to do so.) We also cannot help having an enormous smile on our faces after inhaling the fresh scent of these essential garden flowers.

Another exciting benefit of bees interacting with the flowers is making their lavender honey. It sounds yummy! I have yet to sample it but plan to — soon.

Lavender loves hot, dry, gravelly areas. Please, don't pamper these plants with fertilizer and regular watering. Fewer applications will go a long way in providing healthy, hardy, and happy plants. Most varieties are hardy from zones 5 to 9. Grow them in full sunlight with well-drained, limestone-enriched soil.

Most variety blossoms are shades of violet, with some having white to pink. Newer and more hardy varieties are now available and can be available in your local garden center.

Growing lavender is an essential commercial product in France's Grosso and Provence Valleys. Countless acres of highly fragrant purple-blue blossoms smother the landscape, eventually harvested and processed to extract precious quantities of lavender oil worth more than the equivalent weight in gold.

Why travel to France to see and smell these enjoyable plants when they can grow in your garden? Then again, there is no reason NOT to travel to France to see and smell these outstanding flowers. Make sure to say "*Bonjour mademoiselle Abeille!*" when you visit a lavender field.

Leucanthemum – Shasta Daisy



Leucanthemum x superbum or *Chrysanthemum X superbum* – Let's face it — besides roses, this has to be the predominant, long-lasting wildflower of historical significance. There are plenty of these flowers for us to pick and bees too busy-buzz-buzzing on throughout the summer.

After 17 years of exhaustive breeding work, American horticulturist and plant breeder Luther Burbank (1849 to 1926) created the world-famous Shasta Daisy. He named it after Mount Shasta in California. Seventeen years of laborious breeding work to make a new flower — think of that!

Today, the large daisies sold in garden centers and those grown in our gardens are variations of his stunning plant. Being of wild heritage

stock, this perennial is hardy from zones 4 to 9 and versatile in whatever soil type and conditions. These plants will thrive in plenty of sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil.

You can grow these perennials from seed, but purchasing plants (like Shasta and other newer varieties) can give quicker and longer blooming.

Monarda – Wild Bee Balm; Wild Bergamot



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Monarda fistulosa and other species and hybrids – Some wildflowers have become multipurpose “tools” in recorded history. Although they later became adopted to live in our flower gardens, they first established themselves as having some medicinal or other curative qualities, actual and speculative, which people, over time, have valued and cherished. *Monarda* is one such “pharmacy-in-a-wildflower.”

This hardy perennial species (zone 4) belongs to the large mint family, having cross-sectioned square stems and, usually, aromatic leaves. The lavender-blue to lilac-hued flowers are partially tubular with two-lipped, fused petals arranged around a spherical head.

Each flower head lies atop a whorl of pale-green modified leaves called bracts. The medicinal properties are extracts from the juice or sap from the stems or the dried, pulverized, or boiled leaves, flower heads, and bracts. They concocted drinks or combined the powder with animal fat to form a skin balm.

Native Americans applied this homemade *Monarda* balm to help ease the pain of bee and wasp stings. The early colonists and pioneers later learned of this do-it-yourself remedy. Since most colonists were ignorant of Latinized botanical names, they simplified and renamed all *Monarda* species as Bee Balm.

All *Monarda* flowers have a tubular petal construction that suits visits by bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies — they all have long tongues to insert into the tubular flowers. Bumblebees prefer the lavender-blue blossoms and need to crawl headfirst into the flowers. Hummingbirds prefer to insert their long beaks into the eye-catching bright crimson flowers (like *Monarda didyma*) while hovering near them. The butterflies land on whatever color is nearby and uncoil their drinking straw mouths into the blossom. There. These excellent pollinators can now enjoy a sweet meal.

Monarda fistulosa prefers sunny, partially dry to moist, but well-drained, fertile soil. Being a wildflower, it can grow tall and bushy — somewhat problematic by becoming weedy in ideal locations. The flowers will be in bloom throughout the summer.

What is troubling is finding plants or seeds. You can purchase seeds from specialty wildflower companies while garden centers and nurseries prefer to sell the hybrid varieties — which are also great for pollinators but may have a different quantity (and caloric quality) of nectar.

Papaver – Poppy



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Papaver rhoeas; Papaver nudicaule; Papaver somniferum – All flower gardens must include this large group of plants. Most species and varieties can act as annuals or biennials if you sow their tiny seeds on the ground in early spring. Other authorities suggest sowing them in late summer or early autumn. Almost all develop better if you scatter the seed on the soil and do not cover them.

You may question if bees will visit these flowers, but the answer is they will wallow within the silken blossoms, covering themselves with excessive pollen. Bees may not be picky about which pollen it collects. If any flower has plenty, it is much better to gather as much as possible to be converted into “bee-bread” to feed their larval young.

Let's begin with a familiar but delightful species with a long history of cultivation. *Papaver rhoeas* — commonly called the **Corn Poppy**, was once considered a nuisance agricultural weed. Today, these poppies spread via escaped seed from garden plantings or intentionally sowed for roadside plantings for beautification.

As an annual or biennial, its tiny seeds can live for years, waiting for the soil to become disturbed. When so, either by a plow or spade, the seeds germinate, then quickly grow and bloom into vibrant red flowers. I love how it will pop up here and there in a garden every spring from its self-sown seed. Depending on your location and climate, they bloom from spring to late summer. It is native to southern Europe, especially around the Mediterranean areas. Historically, the red petals became a memorable symbol of the tragedies of World War I.

The flowers are not always bright red. In 1880, the Reverend William Wilks of Shirley, England (a suburb of London) discovered one or more of his red poppies had different shades of different colors, becoming known as the **Shirley Poppy**. These plants have vivid yellow, pink, orange, and white variations.

Another candidate for being a poppy for bees is *Papaver nudicaule* or the **Iceland Poppy**. While the above Poppies are annual, this species takes the honor of being a perennial — with a few caveats. This species is temperamental, being 'somewhat' challenging to raise and grow. It can be slow-growing, so have patience when the seedlings grow in your garden.

Native to the far northern regions of North America and Asia, this poppy loves colder climates and soil. It's hardy from zones 3 to 5 (as a perennial), but it will be annual or biennial in warmer locations. Don't worry about it — sow the seeds outdoors in a sunny area of the garden in the fall. Then cross your fingers for late spring and early summer flowers. Please remember the seedlings do not transplant well because of having long taproots.

The crepe paper-like petals have bright colors ranging from red, yellow, orange, pink, and white with bicolors galore.

One other entertaining poppy is a perennial but also treated as an annual, for it will bloom quickly from seed sown in the spring. It is *Papaver somniferum*, the **Opium Poppy** or **Bread Seed Poppy**. Worried the “garden police” will ransack and uproot your prized perennials and petunias, thinking they are opium poppies? You may think you are about to embark on a clandestine operation as an opium gardener, but fear not; these are not the illicit plants grown in some areas of the drug cartel world.

Most of these poppy varieties produce insignificant amounts of latex to form opium. But... can it affect the bees? They appear to “frolic themselves silly” while gathering the pollen. A troubling question has always concerned me — can they become, excuse my slangy vernacular, “junkie bees” overdosing on opium-infused pollen? Will it make them spaced out, loopy and sleepy? Never mind. My cluttered mind can think of the weirdest things.

These poppies produce many single to double-flowered varieties, with several blossoms up to four to five inches in diameter. They are available in white, red, pink, purple, and stunning bicolors. They self-seed a-plenty and bloom from early to mid-summer.

You can never go wrong in having all the poppies mentioned here growing in your garden. You can find these seeds in many seed catalogs and garden centers.

Unless you cut off the developing seed capsules of all these poppies, many seedlings will emerge next spring from them self-seeding the ground. Enjoy all those colorful blossoms and pollen-dusted bees!

Reseda – Mignonette



***Reseda odorata* “Machete”** – The name ‘Mignonette’ is French for little darling, and ‘reseda’ means to calm down or have a calming influence.

While conquering various countries, Napoleon Bonaparte came across this plant growing wild in northern Africa. He eventually shipped seeds to his beloved Josephine. Ages before text messaging, he probably sent an archaic form of communication called “a letter” to her. Here, it may have read (in French):

“My dearest Jo, – I marched across Northern Africa. OMG, what an exhausting trip! I found this wonderfully fragrant flower. I thought of you. Enclosing some seeds. Love from your little darling, – Nappy. XXX”

Well, he may have sent a note like that. Probably not... but moving along, Empress Josie loved the perfume so much that she called the

flowers “mignonettes.”

The plant likes to grow in sunlight and moderately dry, lime-based soil. It is weed-like, being lanky in growth. It grows to two feet tall and becomes bushy. The flowers are not especially colorful or attractive, but they release a delightful raspberry perfume into the air day and night. You can detect the fragrance yards away. The hordes of honey bees will know about this plant and compete to obtain all the nectar and pollen a plant will provide.

The trouble in growing this delightful flower is not in sowing or raising the plants but in finding the seeds. Very few seed stores offer it. Sorry, you will have to hunt for this plant via the internet.

They make excellent cut flowers and container-grown plants. Be a darling and grow this not only for your enjoyment but also for the neighborhood honey bees!

Rosa – Rose



Rosa rugosa*; *Rosa gallica officinalis and other species and varieties – When it comes to “all things about flower gardening,” we can never overlook the subject of roses. The problem with discussing roses is that there are so many species and varieties that confusion eventually lingers regarding what to plant.

Fortunately, we should grow single to partially double-petaled roses for our bees. Sorry, extravagantly complex double-petaled roses will not make any bee happy. There are too many petals to crawl into the flower center to find pollen and nectar. We have to think like a bee; if we see a rose with bright yellow stamens, that’s the one to visit.

So, that prevents us from growing several of our old-fashion heritage roses, such as the Cabbage Roses (*Rosa centifolia*), for they have over a

hundred petals. Pretty, yes, but a nightmarish maze and energy-waster for any bee.

Modern roses, especially Hybrid Tea varieties, also have excessive doubleness and contribute to an even less appeal to bees. Wild roses are our best bet for growing in a pollinator garden for their simple construction and ease for bees to collect pollen and sip nectar. Although they may have a limited bloom period (compared to modern hybrids), they produce an abundance of flowers which is nirvana for any bee.

If you have room in your flower garden, plant one (preferably more) shrub roses like **Rugosa roses** (*Rosa rugosa*) for brilliant bloom, color, scent, and hardiness (Zones 3 to 9.) Also, grow the historic **Apothecary's Rose** (*Rosa gallica officinalis*) — if you can find it — for its OUTSTANDING fragrance. Hardy from zones 4 to 9, it eventually grows tall and wide and blooms only in late spring to early summer, but what a great show and smell it produces. As shown in the above photo, I have always seen bees rummaging among the plentiful stamens.

Rambling or climbing roses can also be planted, especially if you have limited horizontal space. There are several varieties, but again, choose those with single or semi-double petals.

Before you leave this section, I must point out one of my poems (yes, I dabble in poems as reflected in one of my earlier ebooks entitled "***Petal Poems — Garden Seasons***") about smelling a rose. I hope you enjoy it:

Nose in a Rose

Before you place your nose

Into the folded petals of a rose,

Make sure first to look and see

If it is currently occupied by a bee.

Something crawling in it is a surprise

Making a panic attack suddenly arise.

*The question is who is more alarmed,
You or the bee most likely to be harmed?
The busy bee was in the rose first
Searching for nectar to quench her thirst.
Saying, "How rude to have a big nose land
In my flower that's fragrant and so grand."
What began as pleasure so great
To inhale perfume that's first-rate,
Suddenly turned scary as to flee,
For the bee would most certainly agree.
Nervous reflexes kick into high gear,
Propels bodies away due to fear.
As a mouth emits a loud scream,
The bee did the same, it would seem.
Life is full of surprises bad and good,
How we react to them is rarely understood.
A nose can get in trouble, you have to admit,
The lesson here is to watch where you put it!*

Rudbeckia – Black-Eyed Susan



Rudbeckia fulgida; *Rudbeckia hirta* – Commonly called “**Black-Eyed Susan**,” this hardy (zones 4 to 9) perennial hails from the wild stock of North American prairie heritage; these plants can tolerate heat, dry soil conditions, and occasional neglect. Several bees and butterflies certainly do not neglect them over the summer.

Each plant forms larger clumps over time and is relatively maintenance-free. The long-stemmed flower heads are long-blooming throughout the summer.

Rudbeckia can suffer from extended periods of soggy soil, so make sure your ground is well-drained. Don’t worry about fertility, for they seem to grow best (and be healthier) if not over-fertilized.

The only downside of these plants is they can be short-lived perennials. The blossoms can produce many seeds, which weaken the plant and may not survive a winter.

One of the best and extensively grown varieties available is **Goldsturm**, having brilliant yellow petals with a dark brown to black central cone — the “black-eye.” It grows to over three feet tall and is bushy, producing boat-loads of daisies for the bees and butterflies to visit throughout the summer.

Although many varieties have variations of bright yellow and dark center flowers, new types are being bred, showcasing unexpected colors. Are they more attracted to our neighborhood bees? Possibly, but for good measure, try to grow the wildflower type in your garden.

Less-hardy (zone 8) or annual *Rudbeckia* free-flowering varieties are available to gardeners. *Rudbeckia hirta* has gorgeous mixed-color orange, red, and yellow flowers. It is also a carefree addition to a bed or border.

Many garden centers will offer these plants and several other spectacular varieties.

Salvia



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Salvia species and varieties – Along with *Monarda*, described earlier, *Salvia* is also a prominent member of the Mint family, with a tremendous number of annual, perennial, and woody shrub species and varieties. These plants share common characteristics of the mints, such as square-shaped stems, aromatic leaves, and fused petals forming a tube containing sweet nectar.

The plants are spectacular in their summer-long display, but they attract pollinators differently based on flower color. Instead of displaying a rainbow of coloration, *Salvia* usually broadcasts two light wavelengths — red or blue — in stunning radiance. There are other paler shades available, such as orange, pink, purple, and white, but for

sheer visual excitement and jaw-dropping amazement, the reds and bright blue varieties are the ones to grow.

Red flowers usually attract hummingbirds, but they also admire the electric-blue shades since the flower structure allows them to drink the sweet elixir of nectar. Our bees visit mainly blue or purple-flowered types. Butterflies, another important pollinator, appear to see all colors — especially those paler-shaded flowers. Hey, all the merrier with enjoying a fresh draft of *Salvia* nectar!

Salvia can grow from one to six feet tall and hardy from zone 4 and up, depending on the species or hybrid variety. They all share standard growth requirements: sunny, warm-to-hot, and well-drained to dry locations. You can also grow the shorter types in containers and see the close-up of the bees, hummers, and butterflies.

The following vital question is what to plant to attract bees. There are many species and varieties to choose from but select any of the vibrant blue or purple types. Some flowers are larger than others which will attract the bumblebees, but smaller blossoms are essential for honey bees and, especially, for the tiny — but highly valuable — solitary bees. The small-flowered types are the right size for them to crawl into for a quick drink. The flower size and tongue size are the limiting factors on which bee species can effectively pollinate a blossom.

Many seed catalogs will offer different species and hybrid varieties. Most types are easy to grow from seed but require time to grow to their full blooming potential. It may prove challenging to purchase your “wish-list” plants from local garden centers. Your best bet is finding them via specialized internet nurseries raising rare plants.

Tithonia – Mexican Sunflower



Tithonia rotundifolia – If you could pick one summer blooming plant that provides the favorite hangout for the neighborhood butterflies, hummingbirds, and all sizes of bees — all at the same time — this is it!

I witnessed wings galore hovering, flapping, and buzzing in one public garden over several hundred of these daisy-like, reddish-orange, or yellow, flat-topped blossoms. These flowers exuded plenty of nectar and pollen that attracted many pollinator customers.

Unlike most relatives of sunflowers, this eye-catching annual plant native to Mexico and Central America only grows to an average of five feet tall, with large deep green leaves and vibrant, orange-red to pure yellow, daisy-like flowers. Over the summer to fall, one plant can

produce several side branches, highlighting several of these long-stemmed flowers to enjoy.

Tithonia can quickly grow from seed and establish in any garden if raised in full sunlight and less fertile soil. You don't have to worry about watering it if you are away for an extended period, for it is one of the most drought-tolerant tall-growing flowers you can grow in a garden.

Varieties called **Torch**, **Yellow Torch**, and **Sundance** are available as seeds from many catalogs and garden centers. The seeds are large enough to handle and simple to insert into the soil.

Trifolium – Red and White Clover



Trifolium pratense; *Trifolium repens* – The neighborhood bees will love you if you grow these poor, misunderstood plants. Gardeners consider all clover as weeds, but they have some crucial advantages for living in our lawns and gardens.

White Clover or **Dutch Clover** (*Trifolium repens*) is considered more of a nuisance in lawns, but it helps soil fertility and attracts honey bees. I wince with sadness every time I mow the lawn, knowing I accidentally drove over and decapitated honey bees visiting the blossoms. Yes, it's true!

While cutting, I think of inventing an attachment to the front of the mower resembling the “cowcatcher” — also known as a pilot or rail guard — of the old-style train engines. Engineers designed those things

to plow an occasional cow off the tracks (horrendous to think about) to allow the speeding train along unhindered. Here, my idea is to “gently” push the bee offside the advancing mower and have it buzz off to avoid certain death. Well, call me crazy, but mowing grass can become a murderous affair — to an insect.

Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) is a taller, more sturdy plant worth adding to your garden. The flower heads are a beautiful purple/red, while the stems have three leaflets, each having an attractive white “V-shape” pattern. Growing as a short-lived perennial, this plant will not be invasive and attracts butterflies and bumblebees. Living in the country, I view acres of this clover and related alfalfa plants in full bloom each summer. I can only imagine the multitude of small bees (including large bumblebees) that buzz to every blossom.

Hardy from zones 4 to 9, raise these plants in full to partial sunshine and well-drained soil.

Many companies selling wildflower or agricultural seeds should have these species available, for they are easy to grow. I have never seen nursery plants offered to gardeners.

Verbena – Purple-Top Vervain or Brazilian Vervain



Verbena bonariensis – Here is a garden plant that is simple, elegant, and beautiful when being showcased in the garden border. Its long, sturdy stems branch out into smaller stems, culminating in many small pinkish-purple florets. Their long stems and floral clusters add an air of lightness and loftiness.

For additional garden enjoyment, these delicate flowers attract several bees and butterflies from around the neighborhood to land on the flower heads to partake in the heartily imbibing of sweet nectar.

Raise this plant by seed sown in the early spring. Germination can take time, so be patient. The plants prefer to grow in sunny, well-drained, but fertile soil.

Now don't cringe, but mature plants can reach a height of nearly six feet, but usually less. They will become bushy with all those tall branching stems. You can place these plants in the back of a border or the center of a flower bed.

Although classified as an annual, it can be perennial if you live in zones 7 to 10 (lucky you.) In these zones, the plants can become very large and, sometimes, borderline weedy — to the point of being semi-invasive.

Being an excellent gardener, you know the drill by clipping off spent flowers to prevent re-seeding. I can think of several flowers that are or can become serious weeds. This may be one such plant, but since it attracts several pollinating insects, is it such a high crime to grow more of them?

Zinnia



Zinnia elegans and hybrids – Zinnias are simple to grow from self-sown seeds and easy to nurture in any garden. Many varieties have a broad range of vivid colors and sizes. The most important quality is being able to bloom for most of the summer.

As an annual, you can sow or sprinkle the flattened seed of Zinnias in a well-prepared, well-drained bed exposed to as much sunlight as possible for best blooming.

They are our most dependable cottage garden favorites, providing a valuable nectar source for all bees and butterflies. Well, the problem lies with the fully double-flowered varieties. They are beautiful and popular to include in gardens, but their excessive disc floret petals prevent these insects from searching for nectar.

Several varieties appear to produce more nectar than others. Those varieties with an open center area with exposed bright yellow disc florets are what bees enjoy most. These small florets are accessible for all sizes of bee tongues to search for each blossom's interior store of nectar.

So, which varieties can you grow to get maximum pollinator activity in your garden? Several types are available, but I recommend growing a hybrid variety. Wait one moment. Didn't I recommend avoiding most hybrid flowers in the Introduction? Why now accept Zinnia hybrids?

The simple answer is resistance to the powdery mildew fungal disease. Old-fashioned Zinnias are notorious for being susceptible to this disease. Hybrid Zinnia plants are more disease-resistant. Thus, they grow and bloom better. They are also perfect for containers if you have limited garden space.

Many printed or online seed catalogs and garden centers supply hybrid Zinnia seeds. Look for the hybrid **Profusion Series**, which is shorter with a wide range of colors.

For maximum bee and butterfly enjoyment, sow the seeds of the multi-colored variety called **Lilliput**. I once read that butterflies absolutely love to visit this variety. If they love it, so will all bee species. It is an heirloom type and not a hybrid. Unfortunately, it is susceptible to powdery mildew fungus by mid to late summer. Oh well, the bees and butterflies may not mind.

Fall Blooming Flowers

There comes a time when, without looking at the calendar, we can sense that summer is on the wane. In northern latitudes, the angle of the sun and the day length are less. The weather chills noticeably, especially from evening to the morning but returns warm by afternoon.

Bees are at feverish activity now, darting from blossom to blossom to get as much pollen and nectar as possible before the growing season ends. For the garden, the summer blooming plants look decreed and less picturesque. Fortunately, some flowers provide a splendid display of bright colors this time of year.

As winter slowly advances, several plants now produce less or no flowers. Solitary bees are buzzing about finding any flower they come across in hopes of it providing enough nectar. I had to marvel at the tenacity of a few small bumblebees frantically rummaging among the petals of an equally tenacious clinging-to-life French Marigold (*Tagetes*) for a quick meal — by late November! This would count as one advantage of global warming, which, usually by now, all flowers (and adult bees) would be dead.

The following plants provide us with splendid displays and give bees an added boost of nutrition. There are not as many flowers to enjoy compared with summer, but they exhibit a stunning grand finale to the floral year.

Anemone – Windflower



Anemone hupehensis var. japonica and *Anemone tomentosa* – Although native to China, the Japanese grew and bred these magnificent plants for hundreds of years. During this time, they created many varieties — not much in different colors but in size, floral form, and bloom time. They only display shades of pink, pale lavender, and white, but their appearance is exquisitely perfect.

Anemones grow tall — most to nearly seven feet — and less wide, commanding wide-eyed attention. Asian people called this plant “windflower” due to its long flower stems (inflorescence). Their imagination suggests that a slight breeze will gently sway the flowers as if they’re dancing in the air. Isn’t that a beautiful vision?

Should you grow this perennial in your garden? Well, it won the 2016 Perennial Plant Association “Plant of the Year” award if that helps in your decision. Most varieties are super-hardy from zones 4 to 8.

For some strange reason, I never find them offered in garden centers or nurseries in the spring. Fall blooming plants always get a ‘bum rap’ by not being offered for spring sales in nurseries. A far better reliable method to get plants is by mail-order nurseries.

Get *Anemone x hybrida* ‘**Honorine Jobert**’ for your garden. This lovely antique or heirloom variety (1858) grows up to five feet tall with several two to three-inch, single-to-semi-double, pure white blossoms with several bright yellow stamens. The petals have a lovely satiny sheen, which dares you not to glance but gaze at the flowers.

Another beautiful species/variety is *Anemone tomentosa* ‘**Robustissima**’ or *Anemone vitifolia* ‘**Robustissima**.’ This robust plant can grow to four feet tall and is very bushy with silvery-rosy-pink flowers produced continuously from midsummer until a killing frost.

You can expect blossoms for several weeks, from late summer to a killing frost. It is not unusual to see several bumblebees rummaging within the stamens, carrying circular packs of pollen on their hind legs, ready to transport back to their nest. For them, this is a treasured resource at this time of year. I am unsure if they are obtaining nectar — hopefully, they are.

These plants prefer to grow in partly sunny or dappled-shady locations with fertile, well-drained soil. They can tolerate full sunshine but will suffer in hot, dry soil. I suggest you plant them where they are in the shade for part of the afternoon. Always make sure the soil is moist during periods of drought.

Aster (or Symphyotrichum) – New England Aster



Aster novae-angliae or *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae* – These stately plants, native to North America, display their bright purple flower clusters with yellow centers across the rural landscape. You do not need a calendar to determine when fall is beginning.

One beauty is the **New England Aster**. Older reference books list this plant as *Aster novae-angliae* (which I grew up with), but botanists now classify it as *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*. Let's quickly say that name several times! Between you and me, let's keep it named *Aster*.

Native to North America, it displays prodigious quantities of bright purple flower clusters with yellow centers across rural landscapes and wild gardens. A single plant can grow over six feet and flaunt the

plethora of its blossoms for about one to two months providing a vital pollen and nectar source for many species of bees and migrating Monarch butterflies.

It acts as a weed for it self-seeds a-plenty in favorable growing conditions such as fertile and moist soil and sunny locations. It can tolerate drier soil, partial shade, and less-than-ideal habitat but may grow less tall. We can develop these wild plants in our gardens if you periodically clip off the top and side growing shoots (similar to cultivating Chrysanthemums) until mid-summer to create a low-growing, bushy, cushiony plant by Autumn. The resultant flowering will amaze you — and the bees!

These stunning plants are hardy from zones 3 to 7 but will suffer in warmer zonal locations.

Clematis – Sweet Autumn Clematis



Clematis paniculata or *Clematis terniflora* – When you think of Clematis, you probably envision those large-petaled, summer-blooming varieties. They are impressive, aren't they? I suppose bees will visit them, but they will be more drawn to this species which blooms in the fall. Wait — I should use the CAP key on that sentence making the word BLOOMS. A well-grown, older plant trained to vine all over a supporting structure will cover from ground to sky with millions (oh, let's be daring and say billions) of small, pure white, almond-scented flowers. No wonder this is the most popularly grown Clematis in the world.

As a member of the Buttercup family, honey bees and, more likely, bumblebees will forage uncontrollably for the nectar and excessive pollen. We can only imagine them thinking, "*So many flowers and so little time to visit them all!*"

The vines must grow in as much sunlight as possible with fertile, well-drained, and mulched soil. Mulching helps cool the roots but also retains moisture and controls weeds.

All Clematis (including this species) are not quick growers, for it may take two years or more to become established and bloom.

This species will survive zone 4 to 9 winters with ease. Prune these haphazard growing vines to a couple of feet above ground after they bloom to prevent excessive seed formation. This is important because it is considered an invasive species in many eastern areas of the United States.

Many Clematis species (again, including this one) and varieties are slow to wake up in the spring after a winter slumber. This lethargy can cause concern for new gardeners thinking their plants are dead. Allow them enough time in the spring to awaken. If nothing grows by early summer, it's time for a funeral service at your compost pile or bin.

Sedum – Stonecrop



Sedum spectabile; *Sedum ternatum* or *Sedum acre* – One of the most carefree garden and landscaping plants is a member of the large *Sedum* family. Once planted, they usually thrive (and multiply) with little help — but they would appreciate some attention and admiration now and then. Who doesn't?

Even with this glowing attribute, people consider them boring for not having vibrantly colorful flowers, or they bloom in the fall. These are poor excuses, for all *Sedum* species and varieties have excellent qualities for growing in all gardens. They tolerate full sun and dry soil by having succulent leaves, so you do not have to water often. This is ideal when planting in sandy or gravelly soil exposed to dry locations.

There is only one precaution to keep in mind when growing these plants: never plant them in consistently moist or wet soil, for the stems will rot.

Depending on the species and type, *Sedum* will have clusters of star-shaped rose-pink, white or yellow flowers, and beautiful leaf colors, including variegations.

Now, let's get to the vital aspect of what type to grow in your bee-attracted garden. The star-shaped flowers of the tall-growing varieties such as **Autumn Joy** appear as large, rose-pink to white clusters. Many species of bees and butterflies will eagerly sample these tiny blossoms throughout the late summer and fall.

Many garden centers and mail-order nurseries will have this and many other varieties available for you to plant in your garden.

Solidago – Goldenrod



Solidago altissima and other species – There are some beautiful “weeds” you do not think of as weeds. Goldenrods are splendid examples. You will forget about weed phobia for several weeks from late summer into mid-fall when admiring their tall, bright yellow flower clusters.

Many insects now take advantage of visiting the tremendous number of nectar-packed florets on each stem or inflorescence. Large congregations of honey bees, bumblebees, solitary bees, and various species of butterflies, beetles, and wasps compete for pollen and nectar. With wasps, they hunt those other bugs. It’s that “circle of life” sort of thing.

Long popular in Europe as valued garden plants, the opposite is true for gardeners in North America. As more gardeners learn it does not contribute to hay fever, which results from wind-blown Ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*) pollen, they are now more receptive to adding this attractive perennial to their gardens.

Goldenrod is not just one or two species but nearly 140 species and varieties. You may prefer something other than the stately seven-foot-tall-plus species. There are now new dwarf varieties or hybrids available you can plant for late summer enjoyment.

All tall and short plants are hardy from zones 3 to 9 and prefer to grow in full sun and moist, fertile soil. Try to combine this perennial with the purple Asters in your garden to be a beacon to attract plenty of bees and some butterflies.

You can purchase seeds from wildflower seed companies. Larger garden centers and nurseries may offer dwarf hybrid varieties.

Solidarity With Solitary Bees

Most of the attention to bees and the pollination of flowers centers primarily around honey bees and, to a lesser degree, bumblebees. For obvious reasons, honey bees are essential in pollinating our food crops and producing honey.

Many other bees do not live in hives or colonies or store honey but live independently. They are called solitary bees, for they exist alone without help and are usually non-aggressive.

Biologists estimate over 200 species of these bees worldwide, and they are the vital pollinator of most wildflowers. You have probably seen them on several flowers but misidentified them as tiny honey bees, bumblebees, or wasps. Look at the above *Helianthus* or Sunflower section photo and see if you can find them.



Solitary bee sizes and colors differ and exhibit different lifestyles based on what materials they specialize in constructing their nests. There are digger bees (soil), carpenter bees (wood), and plaster or mason bees (clay). Our common garden-type solitary bees excavate soil or find small holes and cracks in trees or manufactured structures to prepare a simple tubular nest for their larva. They will live next to each other if the tubular holes are close by, like tenants in an apartment building.

The above photo is an excellent example of a manufactured wooden bee apartment complex. Within these small tubes, they stuff a ball of compacted pollen mixed with nectar (called “bee bread”) and lay a single egg. The bee will seal this area with a circular leaf cut or a thin layer of clay, then make a new cell of compacted pollen mixed with nectar and lay another egg. They seal this cell shut with another cut leaf or clay to harden.

Depending on the tunnel’s size or tube, a series of these solitary cells are made, and the entrance is then closed. Mama bee has performed her motherly duty and will no longer care for her babies. Whew! So much work to raise a new generation. If time and health allow, she will make a new series of egg-laying within solitary pollen-laden cells in another tube.

Her eggs will hatch, and the developing larva will eat the protein and sugary-rich pollen plug meal. Eventually, it will pupate (remember metamorphosis in biology class?) and later emerge as an adult, chewing her way out along with her fellow newly developed sisters and a few brothers (drones).

The drones emerge first and fly off to find neighboring female bees. The female bees later emerge and then mate. The boys soon die afterward from sexual exhaustion — what a way to go! The newly mated females fly off to find new pre-dug tunnels or bore new holes, gather pollen and nectar, and start the egg-laying process again. Depending on the season, all this happens within the same summer or will wait until the following spring.

The Other Flying Pollinator



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Other than bees, butterflies, moths, and hummingbirds, another essential flying pollinator needs to be noticed and is usually unacknowledged. This group is the flies. Yes, a fly.

Since this eBook is about bees, there is a large group of flies (estimated at over 6000 species plus) called **Hoverflies** (or **hover flies** if you prefer a space between words) that have a remarkable appearance to resemble bees and wasps.

There is a fascinating biological adaptation called Batesian Mimicry (discovered or first described this adaptation by H.W. Bates in 1862) in which an animal mimics or looks like another unrelated animal for survival advantages. Here, this group of flies mimics the appearance

and behavior of bees and wasps. It's based on the old principle "*if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck.*" If the fly resembles a bee or wasp, then it must be able to sting. It is not so, but it can fool many people and potential predators like birds.



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Often called **Syrphid flies**, we find them worldwide (except in both polar areas) and have different species that specialize in mimicking specific bees or wasps. Some look like honey bees, bumblebees, or, more commonly, a generic look of what a bee should resemble.

The **Marmalade Hover Fly** (*Episyrphus balteatus*), shown above, looks like a bee or a wasp. The abdomen is flattened with alternating stripes of black or reddish-brown and yellow. Comically, this fly moves its abdomen up and down like it's preparing to sting you. Oh, this is one sly bug! These flies will spend the summer and fall buzzing here and there,

visiting flowers to lap up pollen and nectar. While doing so, they provide a valuable service to the flowers by pollinating them.

I will not describe how to distinguish between these flies and bees exactly. Here is where your favorite internet search website can be of excellent use.

This entire group of flies is valuable for being in your garden, not only for pollination but also for controlling aphid (whitefly and greenfly) populations. The larval stage of these flies is predatory on these insects. Other hoverfly species larvae provide litter or, more accurately, corpse control by eating dead bugs. Yummy.

Finally, many non-mimical flies will also pollinate flowers like those in the Arum family. Arums have weird hood-like spathe and inner rod-like spadix flower construction, and most release a foul-smelling odor to attract flies to the flowers. Flies love smelly rotten meat, and these flowers mimic such material.

Conclusion

The above list of flowers is minimal compared to all the suitable bee-friendly types that can grow in your garden. For example, several other Composite-type flowers, such as Dahlias, are available to attract them. Wildflowers may not be as colorful as the vibrant hybrid strains offered each year in catalogs and garden centers, but they are “bee-approved” in the quantity and quality of pollen and nectar. It’s time to allocate some garden space for them.

Over the past few years, bee populations have seen a noticeable decline. Here are a few suggestions on how we can help increase their (and let’s also include butterfly) populations.

- Please limit the number of hybrids and multi-petaled flowers you plan to grow in your garden. Single-petaled flowers offer bees more availability of pollen and ease of drinking nectar.
- Try to grow more blue, purple, yellow, orange, and white flowers of different species and varieties in large sections or areas within the garden. Bees are more attracted to these colors and prefer to stay in an area to feed instead of flying here and there to search for other flowers.
- Try to grow more trees, shrubs, bulbs, annuals, herbs, and perennials in the garden. That will include weed plants such as dandelions. Don’t limit to only summer-blooming plants but all-growing season accessibility.
- Malcontent bugs are always present to eat leaves and petals on your favorite plants. Avoid using all systemic insecticides containing active ingredients called neonicotinoids. Try to use soap-based home remedies instead to spray on your plants in the evening before dark. Most bees return to their nest before nightfall. After several minutes, wash off the soapy residue from the plants to prevent harming them. Do not spray during the day, for soap will kill the bees and damage your plants.

- Provide homemade or commercial bee box homes for solitary bees (as shown in the above photo on the solitary bee section.) Several solitary bees will live close together here. If you are handy with power drills, you can drill different size holes in wooden posts or trunks of dead trees. Make sure the holes be of various diameters (but plenty of them) and drill into the wood at multiple depths. It may surprise you, as it did me, that our tiny but mighty solitary bees help pollinate most of our food supply.

What will happen if our bee populations continue to plummet? A frightful vision of coming attractions now occurs in China, where most bee species populations have been decimated in some agricultural regions. Food crops have repeatedly failed because of a lack of cross-pollination.

People have resorted to acting like bees by hand pollinating fruit and vegetable crops using paintbrushes to dabble collected pollen on stigmas of neighboring plants' flowers. They perform this on family vegetable gardens and hundreds of acres of farm crops. Imagine such a chore! It would be easier and less costly to protect all bee species and allow them to cross-pollinate our food crops.

By growing any of the above flowers each season, you are helping to protect them — one blossom and bee at a time.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope this eBook has been helpful to you in learning which beautiful flowers to consider growing in your garden to attract bees.

I have written and published earlier two other companion eBooks on pollinator-friendly gardening. One is *Hummingbird Garden Flowers*, and the other is *Great Garden Flowers for Butterflies*.

Please check with your local agricultural agency office for more information on wildflowers in your region and ways to attract these amazing pollinators to your home garden.

Please visit my author website at <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.