



Flowering Plants For Bees: Recommendations in Watertown

The one best thing you can do for bees is to plant flowers. The bees will find even little flowers in a windowbox or a small container. But what kind of flowers?

Ideally for native bees you want to give priority to flowers native in your region. All bees prefer old-fashioned single varieties of flowers. Some modern ornamentals have had the pollen bred out of them. Doubled flowers don't have any room in the center for bees. Bees generally prefer blue, purple, white, or yellow flowers. Whatever you plant, aim for a variety of flowers so that something is blooming throughout the year. And always look for plants and seeds that are organic and/or untreated with systemic, persistent pesticides.

This list is by no means complete. Nor is it confined to native plants. (That's another issue.)

Tried and True in Watertown

These are plants that bring lots of bees. Some are wildflowers you might call "weeds". This group is roughly in order of flowering.

Crocus, Grape Hyacinth (Muscari), Mountain Bluet (Centaurea), Borage, Raspberries, Nepeta "Walker's Low", Salvia, Blanket Flower (Gaillardia), Butterfly Bush (Buddleia), Oxeye Sunflower (Heliopsis Helianthoides), Anise Hyssop (Agastache), Sunflowers, Purple Coneflowers (Echinacea), Joe Pye Weed, New England Aster, Goldenrod, Sedum "Autumn Joy". For the wildflowers add: Bladder Campion, Daisy Fleabane, St. John's Wort, Hawkweed, Wild Aster.

Bulbs and early spring flowers:

Bulbs help feed the first bees of spring, such as honeybees on warm days, Bumblebee queens, and Early Miner Bees

Crocus, Snowdrops, Siberian Squill, Bleeding Heart (Dicentra), Dandelions, Clover.

Herbs:

Just about any herb draws lots of little bees and other beneficial insects once they flower. The beneficial insects give you an extra bonus of pest control.

Mints, Catnip, Basil, Sage, Thyme, Oregano, Lavender, Chives, Verbena, Marjoram, Cilantro/Coriander, Dill.

Berries:

Berries feed a variety of native bees — and you!

Strawberries, Blueberries, Raspberries, Blackberries, Serviceberry, Bearberry (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi), Common Hackberry (Celtis occidentalis), Elderberry (Sambucus).

Fruiting vegetables:

Some bees have specialized skills for families of vegetables. Squash Bees only pollinate cucurbits. Bumblebees can shake the flowers of nightshades to buzz-pollinate them, and are strong enough to climb into the flowers of legumes.

Cucurbits: Cucumbers, Summer Squash, Winter Squash, Pumpkins, Melons, Watermelons; Nightshades: Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplant; Legumes: Peas, Beans.

Leafy vegetables:

If your greens start to bolt in the heat, let some flower. Bees love the four-petaled yellow flowers of crucifers.

Broccoli, Radishes, Turnips, Collards, Bok Choy, Chinese Broccoli.

Annual flowers:

Usually have a long flowering season, which helps feed bees all summer. Look for heirloom varieties with single flowers. Organic and untreated seeds and starts are widely available.

Cosmos, Bachelor buttons, Lobelia, Zinnias, Cleome, Fuschia, Heliotrope, Lantana, Tithonia, Morning Glories, Sunflowers, Sweet Alyssum, Snapdragons.

Perennial flowers:

Organic and untreated seed are widely available. Organic and untreated live perennials are hard to find.

New England Asters, Black-Eyed Susans, Gaillardia, Cup Plants, Goldenrod, Purple Loosestrife, Centaurea, Bee Balm, Shasta Daisy, Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), Butterfly Weed (*A. tuberosa*), Swamp Milkweed (*A. incarnata*), Salvia, Phlox, Lupine, Meadowsweet, Sneezeweed (*Helenium*), Spiderwort (*Tradescantia*), Turtlehead, Wild indigo (*Baptisia*), Violets (*Viola*), Cranesbill (*Geranium*), Columbines (*Aquilegia*), Black Cohosh (*Actea racemosa*), Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*).

Shrubs:

A good-sized shrub in flower can buzz with bees. Organic and untreated shrubs are hard to find.

Lilac, Azalea, Spirea, Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea Virginica*), Beauty Bush, Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia*), Wisteria, Honeysuckle, Sweet Autumn Clematis, Old-fashioned single Roses, Hydrangea, Azalea, Hawthorn, New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus*), Sourwood (*Oxydendrum arboreum*), Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), Dwarf Sumac (*Rhus copallium*).

Trees:

Trees can be an important source of pollen for bees in the spring. Sadly, some flowering varieties have been bred not to shed pollen. Organic and untreated trees are hard to find.

Fruit trees such as Pears, Apple, Peaches, Plums, Cherries; Willow, Maple, Black Locust, Sumac, Basswood, Sassafras, Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*).

Sources:

Friends of Bees, New England Wildflower Society, Xerces Society, Pollinator Partnership.

Friends of Bees was founded in 2014 by Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice, and the Environment to educate about and advocate for bees and other pollinators. For more information, please visit watertowncitizens.org.