

TOP FORAGE PLANTS FOR A BEE GARDEN IN MAINE Part I

Bees are our most effective pollinators, and flowers are food for bees. To support native bees and honey bees, provide a succession of flowers through the entire growing season. Plants differ in their attraction to bees, and the differences could be subtle. In a University of Maine experiment at four gardens in Old Town, Jonesboro, and Blue Hill, researchers count insects that land on flowers in good weather during three one-minute observations per plant. To date we have tested more than 60 species of native wildflowers, shrubs, bedding plants, cover crops, and herbs. These easy-to-grow bee plants are likely to be successful in your garden:



Anise hyssop, *Agastache foeniculum*, attracts bumble bees. July-Aug. Annual, self sows.



Butterfly milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, is much favored by bumble bees. Aug-early Sept. Native, perennial, late to emerge in spring. Protect from slug damage when first sprouts appear in early June.



Borage, *Borago officinalis*, either blue or white, is eagerly visited by honey bees, bumble bees, sweat bees, and other small native bees. July-Aug. Annual, self-sows.



White meadowsweet, *Spiraea alba* var. *latifolia*, attracts bumble bees, sweat bees, and copious other insects. July-Sept. Native shrub, hardy and easy to grow. May already be in your area.



Summersweet, *Clethra alnifolia*, attracts many bees. Aug-Sept. Hardy native shrub.



Purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*, has often been recommended for bee gardens, attracts bumble bees over a long season. Aug-Sept. Hardy perennial, easy to grow.



White wood aster, *Eurybia divaricata*, is one of many native asters that attracts Honey bees, bumble bees, and sweat bees. Sept. Hardy perennial, easy to spread.



Greek oregano, *Origanum vulgare hirtum*, is popular with bumble bees and sweat bees. June-Aug. Hardy perennial, easy to grow, highly edible for people, too.