



Prickly Ed's Cactus Patch Native Plant Emporium

**Wildly Botanical - Ruggedly Resilient
Native Plants & So Much More!**

The Ultimate Southern New England Pollinator Planting Guide



Backed by Science - Vetted for Practical Garden Success

Explore the top plant picks for pollinator support in our region - Dig in to tips to help you plan and organize your space for maximum ecological benefits and aesthetic outcomes - Learn more about how the ways you plant - and maintain - your space throughout all of the seasons impacts pollinators and the web of life!



And dig deeper and learn even more about helping pollinators - and connect with the people and organizations working to save the little things that run the world - by visiting the “Pollinator Gardening” page of our website www.PricklyEds.com. 🐝🦋🌵

Planting for Performance:

Three Golden Rules for Best Ecological Outcomes



Truly supporting pollinators involves more than planting a patch of flowers. To maximize impacts, focus on how plants work together as a cohesive community. While it may be true that even a container of native plants can offer a last ditch lifeline to a beleaguered pollinator; we need to do much more to help pollinators truly thrive. And good news - these same techniques add health, resilience, and design pizzazz to your space! For best results:

Design in Vertical Layers:

Think of your yard like a mini-forest. Powerhouse canopy trees (like Oaks, Cherries, Maples) form the top layer, providing massive bursts of early-spring food and hosting hundreds of caterpillar species. Understory trees and shrubs (like Dogwoods, Blueberries, Viburnums) form the middle layer, acting as a seasonal bridge and providing cover and shelter. Perennials, grasses, and groundcovers fill the lowest layer, supplying heavy summer nectar and protecting the soil.

Plant in Visual Groups (Drifts):

Foraging bees practice "floral constancy," meaning they target one plant species per flight. Planting a single flower here and there forces bees to waste critical energy flying around to find the next match. Instead, group the same native species in clusters or "drifts" at least 3 feet wide (usually 3 to 5 plants together). This creates a highly visible target that insects can spot easily from the air. The added benefit of planting in this way is that it also creates the best aesthetic design!

Ensure Continuous Bloom:

Select plants for your yard with the vision of always having at least three varieties in bloom from spring through fall. This ensures food for pollinators and also makes for a dynamic design. Many native plants have a fairly short bloom window so careful planning is needed to blend bloom times. In our region trees and shrubs play a critical role in extending the bloom windows so be sure to prioritize these powerhouse plants in your selections.

The Power of Prioritizing Select Native Species

When you prioritize Native Plants you support pollinators – and so much more. Beyond feeding insects, native plant root systems manage coastal storm-water runoff, anchor local soils, reduce the need for water or chemical treatments, and sustain our songbird populations by hosting essential caterpillar protein.

While the Northeastern United States is home to over 3,000 native plant species, **the plants in this handout represent just the top 1% of our regional flora.** The list was methodically created by combining the top picks from regionally specific, rigorous, science-backed databases, including the [National Wildlife Federation \(NWF\) Native Plant Finder](#) developed alongside [Doug Tallamy's Homegrown National Park](#) research, the [UMass Dartmouth Gegear Lab](#) list for endangered bees, the [University of Rhode Island \(URI\) Bee Lab & Pollinator Atlas](#) local recommendations, and regional protection profiles from the [Xerces Society](#) and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#). Together, these resources target the exact species that deliver the highest possible survival rewards for our native bees, butterflies, and critically at-risk pollinators.

As you plan your own unique landscape, incorporate plants that work for your individual site conditions. Assess light, soil type, moisture and other variables and match right plant to right place for success. For diversity and design interest pick an array of plants from the wider Northeast Native Palette to meet your individual landscape goals. But, to deliver the maximum science-backed benefits for pollinators be sure to make space for lots of the plants on the list that follows.

You may be surprised to see so many trees and shrubs highlighted. When most people think of “planting for pollinators”, thoughts turn to flowers - but in our Southern New England Region it is actually the “woody plants” - shrubs and trees - that provide many of the most powerful benefits to local pollinators. And, they offer a myriad of other benefits as well! They provide shade, improve air quality, aid in erosion and stormwater management, offer essential food and cover for local songbirds and wildlife, and provide the foundation of good design.



TREES AND SHRUBS			
Common & Botanical Name	Layer & Size	Growing Conditions	Why It Matters (Science-Backed Impact)
White Oak <i>(Quercus alba)</i>	Large Tree (60–80')	 Med / Dry	Ultimate Keystone: Hosts 450+ caterpillar species; builds the foundational food web for nesting birds.
Black Cherry <i>(Prunus serotina)</i>	Medium Tree (50–60')	 Med / Dry	Early Season Lifeline: Essential spring nectar; hosts 350+ species of butterflies and moths.
Beach Plum <i>(Prunus maritima)</i>	Small Tree (6-10')	 Med / Dry	Lifeline for any Landscape: Essential spring nectar; hosts 350+ species of butterflies and moths.
Pussy Willow <i>(Salix discolor)</i>	Small Tree/Shrub (15–25')	 Wet / Med	Queen Energizer: High-energy pollen critical for newly emerged queen bumblebees.
River Birch <i>(Betula nigra)</i>	Medium Tree (40–60')	 Wet / Med	Specialist Host: Essential keystone host supporting hundreds of beneficial insects.
Red Maple <i>(Acer rubrum)</i>	Large Tree (40–70')	 Wet / Med	First Bloom: One of the earliest spring food sources available for waking native mining bees.
Flowering Dogwood <i>(Cornus florida)</i>	Understory Tree (15–25')	 Med	Specialist Target & Host: Host for 100+ lepidoptera including Spring Azure butterflies and food for pollen-specialist bees.
Smooth Sumac <i>(Rhus glabra)</i>	Large Shrub (8–25')	 Med / Dry	Food and Shelter: Nectar rich blooms and pithy winter bee nesting cavities.

Fragrant Sumac <i>(Rhus aromatica)</i>	Low Growing	 Med / Dry	Food and Shelter in tough spots: Nectar rich blooms and pithy stems for nesting bees and other insects
Highbush Blueberry <i>(Vaccinium corymbosum)</i>	Shrub (6–12')	 Wet / Med	At-Risk Bee Magnet: Bell-shaped blooms match the exact feeding biology of threatened bumblebees.
Canadian Serviceberry <i>(Amelanchier canadensis)</i>	Small Tree/Shrub (15–25')	 Wet / Med	Spring Bridge: Early blooms feed emerging solitary bees; berries feed local birds by early summer.
Red Osier Dogwood <i>(Cornus sericea)</i>	Shrub (6–9')	 Wet / Med	Pollen Specialist Shrub: Crucial food for native bees.
Meadowsweet <i>(Spiraea alba)</i>	Shrub (3–4')	 Wet / Med	Summer Diversity: Recommended by Xerces Society; draws a massive variety of native flies and beetles.
Arrowwood Viburnum <i>(Viburnum dentatum)</i>	Shrub (6–10')	 shade Wet / Med / Dry	Multi-Season Value: High-density lace flowers feed small bees; turns into nutrient-dense autumn berries.
Common Elderberry <i>(Sambucus canadensis)</i>	Shrub (5–10')	 Wet / Med	Beetle & Fly Haven: Flat floral clusters serve as easy-access landing pads for small beneficial insects.
Swamp Rose & Pasture Rose <i>(Rosa palustris / Rosa carolina)</i>	Shrub (3–6')	 Wet (<i>Swamp</i>) / Dry (<i>Pasture</i>)	NWF Keystone Shrub: Simple, open flowers provide massive pollen yields for large native bumblebees.

FLOWERING PERENNIALS AND GRASSES			
Common & Botanical Name	Bloom Time	Growing Conditions	Why It Matters (Science-Backed Impact)
Golden Alexander <i>(Zizia aurea)</i>	Early (May–Jun)	 shade Wet / Med	URI Lab Spring Special: Crucial early nectar source; functions as the primary host plant for the stunning Black Swallowtail butterfly .
Showy, Gray, Seaside, Wrinkleleaf & other Native Goldenrod <i>(Solidago speciosa / S. memories / S. semp./ S. rugosa)</i>	Late (Aug–Oct)	 Med / Dry (<i>S. rugosa handles Wet</i>)	Sun Keystone Perennial: Hosts 100+ caterpillars; provides high-volume, sticky pollen for end of season native bees & critical food for Migrating Monarchs
Blue-stemmed & Zigzag Goldenrod <i>(Solidago caesia / S. flexicaulis)</i>	Late (Aug–Oct)	 shade Med / Dry	Shade Keystone Perennial: Allows homeowners with little sun to still offer support to late-season specialist bees and migrating insects.
Native Asters <i>(Aster novae-angliae / A. laevis / A. novi Belgii / A. oblong.)/ etc.</i>	Late (Aug–Oct)	 Wet / Med / Dry	Pre-Freeze Fuel Tank: Massive nectar yields keep queen bumblebees fed until the heavy frosts - popular stop for migrating Monarchs.
White Wood & Blue Wood Aster <i>(Eurybia divaricata / S. cordifolium)</i>	Late (Aug–Oct)	 shade Med / Dry	Woodland Floor Anchor: Thrives under mature trees; provides critical late-season nectar and abundant color even in shaded areas.

New York Ironweed <i>(Vernonia noveboracensis)</i>	Late (Aug–Sep)	 Wet / Med	URI Lab Late Giant: High-set, intense purple blooms provide rich sugar rewards for long-tongued bees and migrating monarchs.
Woodland Sunflower <i>Helianthus divaricatus</i>	Mid-Late (Jul–Sep)	 Med / Dry	Specialist Nursery & Medicine: Exclusively feeds sunflower-specialist long-horned and mining bees. Pollen naturally helps bumblebees fight gut parasites.
Swamp Milkweed <i>(Asclepias incarnata)</i>	Mid (Jun–Aug)	 Wet / Med	Monarch Host: Obligate host plant for Monarch caterpillars; intense nectar draws massive bee crowds.
Wild Bergamot <i>(Monarda fistulosa)</i>	Mid (Jul–Sep)	 Med / Dry	Long-Tongue Target: Deep, tubular flowers feed long-tongued, at-risk bees tracked by Gegear Lab.
Spotted Joe-Pye & Common Boneset <i>(Eutrochium maculatum / Eupatorium perfoliatum)</i>	Mid-Late (Jul–Sep)	 Wet / Med	Swallowtail & Specialist Magnet: Shared NWF/Gegear target; massive flat clusters provide heavily loaded nectar stops for late summer insects.
Foxglove Beardtongue <i>(Penstemon digitalis)</i>	Early (May–Jul)	 Med / Dry	The Summer Bridge: Fills a critical gap when spring trees finish blooming but summer perennials haven't started.
Wild Geranium <i>(Geranium maculatum)</i>	Early (Apr–May)	 Med	Spring Queen Lifeline: Tough groundcover that provides essential pollen and nectar for waking bumblebee queens.

Foamflower <i>(Tiarella cordifolia)</i>	Spring (Apr–May)	 shade Moist / Med	Shade Ephemeral Support: Ground-hugging shade plant that feeds early-emerging native syrphid flies and solitary bees.
Virginia Mountain Mint <i>(Pycnanthemum virginianum)</i>	Mid (Jul–Sep)	  Wet / Med	Nectar Powerhouse: Consistently ranks highest for insect volume; heavy support for beneficial predatory wasps.
Black-Eyed Susan <i>(Rudbeckia hirta)</i>	Mid (Jun–Sep)	  Med / Dry	Generalist Anchor: Highly accessible, rugged keystone flower that accepts almost any soil type.
Northern Blazing Star <i>(Liatris scariosa)</i>	Late (Aug–Oct)	 Med / Dry	Migration Fuel: Spiked purple blooms sync up perfectly with the Monarch butterfly travel timeline.
Blue Giant Hyssop <i>(Agastache foeniculum)</i>	Mid-Late (Jul–Sep)	  Med / Dry	Bee Favorite: Topping Gegeer Lab lists; rich in essential oils that stimulate native bee foraging.
Little Bluestem <i>(Schizachyrium scoparium)</i>	Grass (All Year)	 Med / Dry	Skipper Host & Winter Shelter: Bunchgrass structure shelters overwintering queens; hosts skipper larvae.
Switchgrass <i>(Panicum virgatum)</i>	Grass (All Year)	  Wet / Med / Dry	Ecosystem Armor: Deep roots protect soil while dense columns offer shelter from insect predators.



Beyond the Blooms: Creating and Maintaining a Pro-Pollinator Yard

Providing a diverse selection of native plants is only the first step. To truly sustain a pro-pollinator ecosystem year-round, assess all of the ways your landscape is laid out and managed. Break free of traditional landscaping habits which are often quite destructive to pollinators - and many other things! By managing physical shelter, chemical inputs, and sensory disturbances, you can establish a sanctuary where insects can safely nest, lay eggs, and survive the winter and in the process create a healthier space for songbirds, wildlife, people, pets, neighborhoods, and waterways. These spaces are the foundation of resilient communities.

Rethink Your Yard Cleanup Routine

- **Leave the Leaves:** Overwintering queen bumblebees, swallowtail chrysalises, and hundreds of moth cocoons depend on fallen leaf litter for insulated protection against freezing temperatures. Instead of bagging or shredding leaves, rake them into your garden beds as a free, nutrient-rich mulch.
- **Save the Stems:** Do not clear out dead perennial flower stalks in the autumn. Tiny, solitary native tunnel bees lay their eggs inside hollow or pithy stems (such as Sumac, Elderberry, and Joe-Pye Weed). Leave stalks standing until late spring when temperatures consistently stay above 50°F.
- **Keep Logs and Snags:** Dead wood is a critical ecological asset. If safe, leave standing dead trees (snags) or place a small log or branch pile in a back corner of your yard. Beetles and carpenter bees use aging wood for nesting, while larger wildlife rely on it for shelter.

Optimize Physical Infrastructure

- **Expose Bare Dirt Patches:** Approximately 70% of our native bee species nest in the ground, tunneling into the soil to lay eggs. Thick layers of wood mulch act as an impenetrable barrier to these tiny insects. Leave small, unmulched patches of bare, well-draining soil in sunny areas for ground-nesting bees.
- **Provide a Mud and Water Source:** Pollinators need water for hydration and mud for nest building. Set out a shallow dish or birdbath filled with stones, gravel, or pebbles. This provides bees and butterflies with a stable landing platform so they can drink safely without drowning.

Eliminate Chemical Hazards

- **Forgo All Insecticides and Herbicides:** Avoid applying any broadcast chemical sprays. Herbicides eradicate the wild floral variety insects depend on, while insecticides indiscriminately kill target pests and beneficial native pollinators alike.
- **Stop Cosmetic Lawn Treatments:** Typical synthetic yard fertilizers and routine chemical insect controls pose severe risks to soil health and local water tables. Broad-spectrum yard applications decimate the complex network of subterranean soil microbes and

underground bee burrows. These same chemicals poison songbirds and wildlife and pose serious health threats to your family and neighbors. Easy solution: Shrink your lawn footprint by expanding your native garden beds! On what lawn remains, forgo chemical applications - mow high, leave clippings. water deeply and seldom.

Mitigate Sensory and Sound Pollution

- **Minimize Nighttime Light:** Artificial outdoor lighting disrupts the flight, mating, and navigation patterns of vital nocturnal pollinators, such as moths and fireflies. Swap out continuous bright white floodlights for motion-activated fixtures or low-intensity warm amber LED bulbs.
- **Buffer Loud Noise:** Intense sound and heavy vibrations from gas-powered yard equipment (like leaf blowers and lawnmowers) disrupt the communication and nesting behaviors of native bees. Planting dense hedges of native shrubs along your property edges creates a helpful wind and sound buffer, dampening neighborhood noise while adding vital habitat layer space.

Many of our landscaping and gardening practices are based on outdated myths & biases. The tips in this handout are based on what the science tells us works and matters in creating places that are good for pollinators and in turn good for people, pets, songbirds, wildlife, neighbors, communities, waterways, and more. Landscaping for pollinators is code for landscaping for a healthier more resilient future for our region. Thank you for being part of the solution!

And don't forget, for lots more ideas, resources, and inspiration on gardening for pollinators - and people - visit our website www.PricklyEds.com

