

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Look for it now in Southwest Ohio!

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Left-to-right: monarch on blue mistflower; sachem skipper on prairie thistle; silver-spotted skipper on blue mistflower; pearl crescent on flat-topped goldenrod.

Fall Wildflowers

Photos and article by Kathie Bowers, Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

While native wildflowers serve many functions, providing pollen and nectar are high on the list. Just like humans, bees and butterflies need to eat in the fall. In too many of our gardens, we concentrate on the summer-blooming plants and forget about the fall. Our native bees and butterflies also need autumn energy sources (nectar) and protein (pollen) so they can create their winter nests for the next summer's generation. Some, such as the monarch and painted lady, need a good energy source to fuel their fall migration.

Many native wildflowers also serve as host plants, meaning certain insect species will only lay their eggs on specific plants and their larvae will only eat the leaves from these plants. For example, in the pictures above, the adult butterflies and skippers are feeding on nectar and pollen from various flowers. However, monarchs will only lay eggs on milkweed, sachem skippers use a variety of grasses, silver-spotted skippers use black locusts, and pearl crescents lay their eggs on asters. When the eggs hatch, the larvae are located on the host plants they have co-evolved to eat, so they don't have to expend energy looking for food.

Fall is a great time to add native plants to your garden, and by including nectar- and pollen-providing flowers as well as host plants, you will ensure a wide variety of wild visitors to your yard. Visit the [Friends of Warren County Park District website](#) for more information on native plants, and the Ohio Division of Wildlife's [Butterflies and Skippers of Ohio Field Guide](#) to learn about common species and their host plants.

FUN FACTS

- Besides providing food for insects, wildflowers also produce seeds, which are important for many native and migrating birds.
- Most native wildflowers have developed deeper roots systems, so they don't need as much watering in the summer and help prevent soil erosion.
- Stem-nesting bees lay their eggs in hollow flower stems to overwinter, so it's good for them if you leave your yard clean-up until spring.
- [Hisey Park](#) is a great spot to find wildflower inspiration!



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