



# NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE PLANTS FOR POLLINATOR SUPPORT

A swallowtail  
visiting native  
mock orange  
in the Pacific  
Northwest



***Planting plants that bees, butterflies, and other pollinators need can help save pollinators and ensure a healthy environment for future generations.***

When creating a pollinator garden or adding plants to your balcony or yard, selecting plants deliberately to support pollinators can help you beautify your area and also create a buzzing paradise for pollinators.

Plants can be grouped into two main types:

1. ***Native plants:*** plants that have been present on the landscape since before human intervention.
2. ***Non-native plants:*** plants that have been introduced, either deliberately or accidentally, usually by humans.

***Let's take a closer look at non-native plants, as some can be great for pollinators and others are detrimental.***

## Types of Non-Native Plants

**1. Crop, garden, and ornamental plants:** those that we grow for food or for beauty, such as apples, lavender, and roses. They usually have been often modified from their natural state, by people, to better provide food or aesthetic appeal.

**2. Invasive plants:** those that are known to invade natural areas, causing harm to human health or the environment. Some garden and ornamental plants, that were brought to North America by settlers, are now known to invade natural areas. These plants can sometimes have a competitive advantage in their new range because they are released from the predators, diseases, and competitors in their native range. They can take over natural areas, crowding out native plants. This can have a devastating effect on pollinators, native plants, and entire ecosystems.

***Selecting plants native to your region will provide the most benefit to pollinators and the environment. As long as you are careful to avoid invasive plants, interweaving some of your favorite non-native plants can have a positive impact. Invasive plants should never be used in pollinator gardens and should be removed when possible.***

## POLLINATOR SUPPORT

### **Native Plants**

Native plants and their pollinators have coevolved over thousands of years in a particular location. Providing native plants in your garden is a great way to bolster the health and persistence of local pollinators and the native ecosystems they support. Many pollinators are 'generalists', like bumble bees, and can forage from many native and non-native plants. However, other pollinators, like many mining bees and caterpillars (larval form of butterflies), need the native plants they've evolved with to survive and thrive.

### **Non-Native Plants**

Many non-native plants can provide pollinator support, especially for more 'generalist' pollinators, like bumble bees, that can forage from lots of different types of plants. Others have been bred, whether to provide food or for aesthetic reasons, and may be less useful for pollinators. For example, many ornamental roses have so many petals that pollinators cannot access the nectar and pollen. Other ornamentals may no longer produce much nectar and pollen as a consequence of breeding.



*A pebble bee visiting native gum plant in the Pacific Northwest*

*A hummingbird moth visiting non-native buddleia*



## SHOULD I USE NON-NATIVE PLANTS IN MY POLLINATOR GARDEN?

***While it is best to use native plants if you want to support pollinators, non-native plants (that are non-invasive in your area) can be a wonderful addition to your pollinator garden.***

So, keep your non-native plants that you enjoy in your garden, the ones that are not invasive, add more pollinator-supporting non-native plants if you like, and definitely explore adding more native plants.

As you add more native plants to your area, you'll likely start to notice that you're seeing more types of bees and other pollinators. Tiny, shiny bees, fuzzy long horned bees, butterflies, and flower flies— all wonderful and essential parts of the ecosystem-- will thrive in your garden.

**Happy Planting!!**

***Find out what plants are invasive in your area by doing an online search that includes your area and invasive plants. For example, if you live in Chicago, you could type into Google, "Illinois invasive plants".***

pollinator.org

Find plants that support pollinators for your region in our [Ecoregional planting guides](#), our [Find Your Roots tool](#), and our [regional garden recipe cards](#). Find native plants to buy by searching for native plant nurseries in your area or at [Stover Seeds](#).