



Hawk Hill Bee Farm

Plantings for Honey Bees in Northern Illinois

A Season-Long Guide for Home Gardens & Community Spaces

Honey bees thrive when landscapes offer nectar and pollen from early spring through late fall. Even small plantings — backyard beds, patio pots, community plots — can make a meaningful difference. The selections below are well-suited to **Northern Illinois** and provide reliable forage across the entire season.

EARLY SPRING BLOOMERS

Critical for colony buildup after winter

Plant	Notes
Willow (dwarf or shrub forms)	One of the earliest pollen sources.
Maple (red, silver)	Vital early pollen; suitable for yards and streets.
Crocus	Easy bulbs; bloom before lawns green up.
Dandelion	Often the first nectar/pollen — encourage tolerance.
Lenten Rose (Hellebore)	Shade-tolerant, long-lived perennial.

LATE SPRING TO EARLY SUMMER

Bridges the gap before major nectar flows

Plant	Notes
Chives	Excellent bee plant; edible and ornamental.
Blueberry	Superb nectar; also a garden crop.
Serviceberry (Amelanchier)	Native shrub/small tree; early nectar.
Catmint (Nepeta)	Long bloom period; bees adore it.
Lupine	Native types support both bees and soil health.

MID-SUMMER BLOOMERS

Peak nectar season — abundant forage

Plant	Notes
Bee Balm (Monarda)	Signature pollinator plant; thrives in Midwest soils.
Coneflower (Echinacea)	Long bloom; drought-tolerant.
Hyssop / Anise Hyssop	One of the best honey-bee plants for gardens.
Borage	Constantly blooming annual; bees flock to it.
Culinary Sage	Ornamental and useful; strong nectar source.
Sunflower (open-pollinated varieties)	Pollen-rich; great for wildlife too.

LATE SUMMER TO FALL BLOOMERS

Essential for winter preparation and fattening winter bees

Plant	Notes
Asters (New England, Smooth, Aromatic)	Top-tier fall nectar; native and hardy.
Goldenrod (Solidago species)	Major fall nectar flow in Northern Illinois.
Sedum ‘Autumn Joy’	Reliable garden perennial; bees cover it in September.
Joe-Pye Weed	Tall, showy, and beloved by all pollinators.

PLANTING TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Choose **native species** whenever possible — they bloom reliably and support broader ecology.
- Aim for **continuous bloom**: at least one plant flowering in each season.
- Plant in **clusters or drifts** so bees can forage efficiently.
- Avoid pesticides, especially systemic ones.
- Leave some areas a bit “wild” — bees appreciate it.