

**Janet B. Carson**  
**Extension Horticulture Specialist**  
**Arkansas Living**  
**March 2017 Bees**

Pollinators are a hot topic right now and the main insect pollinators by far, are bees. Home beekeeping is gaining in popularity with beehives popping up in backyard gardens and hobby and professional beekeeping groups organizing all over the state. While beekeeping involves honeybees—native to Europe, there are over 4,000 species of native bees in the United States that also help pollinate our gardens. Every year we seem to hear new reports of bees declining—whether from parasites, pesticides or lack of host plants, but there are things we can do to help attract bees to our landscapes—both honeybees and native bees.

Bees visit plants for nectar and pollen. Nectar is loaded with sugars and serves as the main source of energy for the bee. Pollen balances out the diet adding proteins and fats. Bees require large quantities of nectar and pollen to live and raise their young, and they visit flowers regularly in large numbers to obtain these foods. Some plants are more attractive to bees than others. Bees are drawn to plants with open or flat flowers with lots of pollen and nectar. The shallow flowers are an easier fit for their shorter mouthparts. Brightly colored petals that are usually blue or yellow or a mixture of these (bees cannot see red) that are open in the daytime, (since bees are not active at night) that have a minty or sweet fragrance are most attractive. Bees can be active year-round, so having plants that bloom in every season is important for the bees.

Even in the winter, bees are active. Consider planting rosemary, hellebores (Lenten roses), mahonia and winter honeysuckle. Camellias and flowering quince follow with their blooms and the spring blooming bulbs are right behind them with more flowers for bees.

As the season progresses, we have a wealth of flowers in the garden. White clover may be considered a weed in the lawn, but it is an excellent bee attractant. There are now some alternative clover lawns going in just for pollinators. Hawthorns, pussy willows, blackgums, linden, tulip poplars and maple tree blooms are great for bees. Fruit trees need bees but they also attract bees, along with our ornamental flowering cherry, redbuds, and crabapples.

There are plenty of shrubs for consideration with hollies being one of the best bee plants out there. Other shrubs include cotoneaster, abelia, cherry laurel, roses, hydrangeas, beautyberry, itea and clethra. Late in the season caryopteris, eleagnus and osmanthus will bloom.

Don't overlook perennials. From the early hellebores to monarda, peony, baptisia, butterfly weed and other milkweeds, trumpetcreeper, agastache, purple coneflower, and coreopsis to the late in the season blooming Joe pye weed, goldenrod, sunflowers,

asters, chrysanthemums, sedums and Japanese anemones all add color and bee attractants.

Many herbs are bee-friendly and herbs can give you double duty—attract pollinators and give you fresh herbs for the kitchen. Some of the top performers for bees include garlic chives (but beware, they can escape), catmint (*Nepeta*), fennel, dill and borage. If you don't do a good job pinching your basil, the bees love their flowers as well. Lavender and rosemary will also be good for fragrance and bees. The salvia family has a whole host of bee-friendly plants. Edible sage blooms in early spring but we have varieties that bloom off and on all season—ending with Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*) with large flowers seemingly covered in purple velvet flowers and pineapple sage is another late season bloomer with beautiful red flowers, but almost all members in the salvia genus attract bees.

A healthy garden with a diverse mix of plants not only is more attractive to a gardener, but attractive to bees, butterflies and birds. Making sure there are blooms in all seasons is also good from a landscape perspective and a bee's perspective.

We all need pollinators in our gardens, whether you are a beekeeper or not. So create a bee-friendly garden. Bees like flowers but they also need a water source, and habitat—protection from the elements and predators. Use caution when applying any pesticides in the landscape, since some are deadly to bees as well as harmful insects. To help bring bees to your garden, adding a diverse mix of plants can extend the season, not only in interest in the garden, but bee visitations. To help attract the native bees consider putting out a native bee home. While you can purchase predrilled wood bee homes, they can easily be made. With a drill bit of various sizes simply take some scrap lumber and drill holes 3 to 5 inches deep but not all the way through the wood block.