

Gardening for Bees - Seasonal Recommended Plant Lists:

The following lists are based on several years of evaluation and survey work done in Northern and Southern California by our UC research group. Plants are presented seasonally, and in alphabetical order, based on the same scheme used in Sunset Magazine's Western Garden Book (2012), edited by Brenzel. Some information on California native plants is also found in Plants of the San Francisco Bay Region by Beidleman and Kosloff (University of California Press, 2003) and in Wildflowers of the Santa Monica Mountains by McAuley (Canyon Publications Co. CA, 1996).

Below you will find separate lists for Spring plants and Summer plants, as well as a key to the shorthand used for bee groups/species in the tables. If you have trouble printing this page, or if your browser is having trouble displaying it properly, there is an unstyled set of lists available. Finally, if you would like to have a portable copy of the lists, or perhaps send them to a friend, we have a nicely formatted PDF version available for download (Latest revision: January 2010). For more information, see the additional text at the bottom of this page.

Spring Plants

| Scientific Name | Common Name | Plant Family | Origin | Annual or Perennial | Pollen or Nectar | Main Bee Visitors | Notes |
|--|---------------------|--------------|--------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Arctostaphylos spp. | Manzanita | Eric. | CA | Per | N | B, Ant | Visitation by bumble bees is low but consistent. |
| Achillea millefolium | Common Yarrow | Aster. | CA | Per | P | H | |
| Berberis spp. | Barberry | Berber. | CA | Per | N | Ant, Osm | |
| Borago officinalis | Borage | Borag. | Exotic | Ann | N | Hb, B | |
| Calendula spp. | Pot Marigold | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | H, Meg | Visitation is variable. |
| Carpenteria californica | Bush Anemone | Philad. | CA | Per | P | B, H, Osm, Meg | |
| Ceanothus 'Julia Phelps' and 'Dark Star' | Wild lilac | Rham. | CA | Per | P | B, sb, H | Excellent spring pollen source for many bee spp. |
| Ceanothus 'Yankee Point' | Wild Lilac | Rham. | CA | Per | P | B, Hb, Ant | Great ground cover |
| Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman' | Wild lilac | Rham. | CA | Per | P | B, Hb, H | Bumble bees adore this plant. |
| Ceanothus thyrsiflorus | Lilac, Blue Blossom | Rham. | CA | Per | P | B, H, Ant, sb | |
| Cercis occidentalis | West. Redbud | Fabac. | CA | Per | N | X, Osm | Excellent nectar source, but short lived. |
| Chilopsis linearis | Desert Willow | Bignon. | CA | Per | P/N | B, X, Meg | Likes warm inland environments |
| Clarkia unguiculata | Elegant Clarkia | Onagr. | CA | Ann | N | B, Osm, Hb | Plant in 1-2 meter diameter patches for best attraction. |
| Collinsia heterophylla | Chinese Houses | Plantag. | CA | Ann | N | B | Plant in shade or partial shade. |
| Coreopsis lanceolata | Lanceleaf Tickseed | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Mel, H, Meg | Long flowering |
| Coreopsis verticillata | Whorled Tickseed | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Mel, H, Meg | Low growing. |

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| Echium candicans | Pride of Madeira | Borag. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Hb, B, Ant, Osm | An attractive Spring nectar plant. |
| Echium plantagiuneum | Salvation Jane | Borag. | Exotic | Per | P/N | B, Hb, Ant | No summer water. |
| Encelia californica | Bush Sunflower | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Mel, H, Meg, Hb | |
| Encelia farinosa | Brittlebush | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Wide var. | Good in So Cal |
| Erigeron glaucus 'Wayne Roderick' and 'Bountiful' | Seaside Daisy | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | H, Cer | Dead-head flowers. Other cultivars less attractive. Likes coastal environment. |
| Eschscholzia californica | California Poppy | Papaver. | CA | Ann | P | B, H, Hb | Mainstay pollen source for many bee species. |
| Gilia achilleifolia | California Gilia | Polem. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, Hb, And | |
| Gilia capitata | Globe Gilia | Polem. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, Hb, And | |
| Helenium puberulum | Sneezeweed | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Meg, Mel | Mel. males sleep on flower heads. |
| Larrea tridentata | Creosote Bush | Zygo. | CA | Per | P/N | Wide var. | Great in So. Cal desert gardens |
| Lavandula spp. | Lavender | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B, X, Meg | |
| Layia platyglossa | Tidy tips | Aster. | CA | Ann | P/N | Mel, Meg, B, Hb | Attracts at low levels. |
| Linaria purpurea | Toadflax | Plantag. | Exotic | Per | N | Anthid, B, Hb, Meg, Ant | Attracts many bee species. |
| Marrubium vulgare | Horehound | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, Meg, B | Dead-head and water occasionally. |
| Mentzelia lindleyi | Blazing Star | Loas. | CA | Ann | P/N | B | |
| Nepeta spp. | Catnip | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B, Osm, Ant | |
| Pelargonium graveolens | Scented Geranium | Geran. | Exotic | Per | N | Meg, Hb | Relatively low, but consistent, bee visitation. |
| Penstemon heterophyllus | Penstemon | Plantag. | CA | Per | N | B, Osm | Plant in patches greater than one meter in diameter. Likes occasional water & good drainage. |
| Penstemon 'midnight' | Midnight Penstemon | Scroph. | Exotic | Per | N | B, Ant | |
| Penstemon parryi | Desert Penstemon | Plantag. | Exotic | Per | P/N | B, Osm, X | Great in So. Cal desert gardens |
| Phacelia californica | CA Phacelia | Borag. | CA | Per | P/N | And, B, Osm | White flowers are small, but very attractive to bumble bees. |
| Phacelia campanularia | CA. Desert Bluebells | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, Hb, Meg | |
| Phacelia cicutaria | Caterpillar Phacelia | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, Osm | Long flowering |
| Phacelia distans | Wild Heliotrope | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | Wide var. | Reseeds |
| Phacelia grandiflora | Large-flower phacelia | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, Hb | |
| Phacelia minor | California bluebell. | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | Wide var. | |

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| <i>Phacelia tanacetifolia</i> | Tansy Phacelia | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, And, Osm, Hb, Cer | One of the best pollen / nectar sources for several Spring bee species. Pollen is purple! |
| <i>Phacelia viscida</i> | Sticky Phacelia | Borag. | CA | Ann | P/N | B, Hb | |
| <i>Salvia brandegeei</i> | Brandegee Sage | Lamiac. | CA | Per | N | B, Osm, Hb, Ant | |
| <i>Salvia chamaedryoides</i> | Germander Sage | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | B, Anthid, Hb | Likes occasional water. |
| <i>Salvia greggii</i> | Autumn Sage | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | X, Hb | |
| <i>Salvia 'Indigo Spires'</i> | Salvia Indigo Spires | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | B, X, Hb, Meg, Ant | |
| <i>Salvia mellifera</i> | Black Sage | Lamiac. | CA | Per | N | B, Osm, Hb, Ant | |
| <i>Sphaeralcea ambigua</i> | Desert Globemallow | Malvac. | CA | Per | P/N | Wide var. | Long flowering |
| <i>Verbena lasiostachys</i> | West. Verbena | Verben. | CA | Per | N | Hb, Ant, B | Dead-head and water regularly to maintain flowering. |

Summer Plants

| Scientific Name | Common Name | Plant Family | Origin | Annual or Perennial | Pollen or Nectar | Main Bee Visitors | Notes |
|---|---------------------------|--------------|--------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| <i>Agastache</i> spp. | Mint, Agastache | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | B, Hb | |
| <i>Aster x frikartii</i> | Monch | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Meg, Mel, H | Dead-head |
| <i>Bidens ferulifolia</i> | Bidens | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Mel, H | Flowers all year, but mostly attractive in Summer. Likes modest water. |
| <i>Calamintha</i> spp. | Calamint | Lamiac | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B | Attracts many bee species. |
| <i>Caryopteris incana</i> | Bluebeard | Verb. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Hb, Ant, Meg | Likes modest water. |
| <i>Caryopteris x clandonensis</i> | Blue Mist | Verb. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Hb, Ant, Meg | Likes modest water. |
| <i>Coreopsis grandiflora</i> cultivars | Tickseed | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Meg, Mel, H, Osm | Best cultivars: "Flying Saucers," "Sunny Day," and "Tequilla Sunrise" |
| <i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i> | Lanceleaf Tickseed | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Mel, H, Meg | Long flowering |
| <i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i> & <i>Cosmos sulphureus</i> | Cosmos | Aster. | Exotic | Ann | P/N | Mel, Hb, H, Meg | Dead-head; likes modest water. |
| Cucurbitaceae | Pumpkin, Squash, Zucchini | Cucrbit. | CA | Ann | P/N | Hb, P | |
| <i>Duranta erecta</i> | Skyflower | Verb. | Exotic | Per | N | B, Hb, Ant | Meg's also use leaves to build nests. Low visitation. |
| <i>Echinacea purpurea</i> | Purple Coneflower | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Mel, Meg, H | Large patches attract best. |
| <i>Encelia californica</i> | Bush Sunflower | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Hb, Mel, Meg, H | Becomes woody and bushy in time. Reseeds easily. |
| <i>Encelia farinosa</i> | Brittlebush | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Wide var. | Good in So Cal |
| <i>Erigeron glaucus</i> "Wayne Roderick" | Seaside Daisy | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | H, Meg, Cer, Hb | |

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|--|---------------------|----------|--------|---------|-----|-------------------------|---|
| Eriogonum fasciculatum | CA buckwheat | Polygon. | CA | Per | N | Hb, Meg | Many other beneficial insects also visit these flowers. |
| Eriogonum grande rubescens | Red Buckwheat | Polygon. | CA | Per | N | Meg, H | |
| Eriogonum latifolium | Coast Buckwheat | Polygon. | CA | Per | N | B, H | Good for coastal environments. |
| Eriogonum nudum | Buckwheat | Polygon. | CA | Per | N | Hb, B | |
| Eryngium spp. | Sea Holly | Apiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Meg, B, Hb | Highly attractive plants for bees, especially Megachilids. |
| Gaillardia x grandiflora | Gaillardia | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Hb, Meg, Mel | Numerous cultivars exist; most are attractive. |
| Gaillardia "Oranges & Lemons" | Oranges & Lemons | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Hb, Mel, Meg, H | |
| Grindelia hirsutula | Hairy Gum Plant | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Meg, Mel, Hb, H | Dead-head and water for continuous flowering. |
| Grindelia stricta | Gum Plant | Aster. | CA | Per | P/N | Meg, Mel, Hb, H, B | |
| Helenium 'Mardi Gras' | Mardi Gras | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Meg, Mel, Hb | |
| Helianthus annuus | Sunflower | Aster. | CA | Ann | P/N | Meg, Mel, Hb, B | Dead-head |
| Helianthus 'Lemon Queen' | Lemon Queen | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Several species | Highly attractive plant for bees. Dies back in Winter. |
| Lavandula spp | Lavender | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B, X, Meg, Ant | Some lavender species are more attractive than others. |
| Linaria purpurea | Toadflax | Plantag. | Exotic | Per | N | Anthid, B, Hb, Osm, Ant | Attracts many bee species. |
| Lotus corniculatus | Bird's Foot Trefoil | Fabac. | Exotic | Ann | N | Meg | A pretty weed, and small Megachilid bees love it. |
| Lotus scoparius | Deerweed | Fabac. | CA | Per | N | Hb, B, Meg | Great nectar source and does well in poor soils. |
| Madia elegans densiflora | Elegant Madia | Aster. | CA | Ann | P/N | Mel, Hb | Flowers close early in warm weather. |
| Marrubium vulgare | Horehound | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B, Meg | Dead-head and water occasionally. |
| Mentha spicata | Spearmint | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Various bee groups(sb) | |
| Monardella odoratissima | Mountain Monardella | Lamiac. | CA | Per | N | B, Osm | |
| Nepeta x faassenii | Catmint | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B, Mel, Osm, Ant | Long flowering. |
| Origanum spp. | Oregano | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, Meg | Plant spreads slowly. |
| Penstemon heterophyllus | Penstemon | Plantag. | CA | Per | N | B, H, Osm, Ant | Likes occasional water & good drainage. |
| Perovskia atriplicifolia | Russian Sage | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, B, Meg | Highly attractive bee plant. |
| Rosmarinus officinalis | Rosemary | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Hb, H, Meg | Low-growing cultivars are more attractive than tall ones. |
| Rudbeckia hirta | Black-eyed Susan | Aster. | Exotic | Ann/Per | P/N | Mel, Meg, H | Large-flower varieties attract best. |
| Salvia chamaedryoides | Germander Sage | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | B, Hb, Anthid | Anthidium male bees patrol this flower and chase away other bees. Likes occasional water. |

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| Salvia uliginosa | Bog Sage | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | X, Hb, Meg, Cer | Likes consistent water. Also attracts hummingbirds and Monarch butterflies. |
| Scabiosa atropurpurea | Pincushion flower | Dipsac. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Mel, Hb | |
| Senecio cineraria | Dusty Miller | Aster. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Meg, Hb | |
| Solidago californica | Goldenrod | Aster | CA | Per | P/N | H, Meg, Hb | Attractive bee plant and some cultivars (such as Soladago 'Leraff') are very attractive. |
| Sphaeralcea ambigua | Desert Globemallow | Malvac. | CA | Per | P/N | Wide var. | Long flowering |
| Teucrium x lucidrys | Wall Germander | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | H, Ant, Xylo | |
| Thymus spp. | Thyme | Lamiac. | Exotic | Per | N | Sb, Meg | |
| Verbena lasiostachys | Verbena | Verben. | CA | Per | N | Hb, Ant | Dead-head and water regularly to maintain flowering. |
| Vitex agnus-castus | Chaste Tree | Verben. | Exotic | Per | P/N | Xylo, B, Meg, Hb | |

Key To Bee Groups

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| B | Bombus (Bumble Bee) |
| Anthid | Anthidium (Megachilidae) |
| sb | One of the many varieties of small bees. |
| X | Xylocopa (Carpenter Bee) |
| Osm | Osmia (Megachilidae) |
| H | Halictid |
| And | Andrenid |
| Meg | Megachilid (Leaf Cutter and Mason Bees) |
| Ant | Anthophorid (Digger Bees) |
| Hb | European Honey Bee |
| Mel | Melissodes (an Anthophorid) |
| Cer | Ceratina (Small Carpenter Bee) |
| P | Peponapis (Squash Bee) |

Additional Information on the Seasonal Recommended Plant Lists

Most information used to create these lists (For example; plant form, flower color, soil and cultivation requirements) can be found in the Sunset Garden Book. [Local nurseries](#) can also be helpful with specific information. All of the plants listed here will flower within one or two years; most during the first year of planting. Other evaluated plants (for example, large shrubs and trees) known to be attractive to bees can be found in our exhaustive [Complete Plant List \[PDF\]](#) (last compiled December, 2003).

For best results in bee gardening, we recommend that advanced planning takes place to insure that continual bee floral food will be available for both Spring and Summer seasons. There are distinct groups of bees present in Spring and in Summer; some groups can also be observed year round. In our experimental gardens in the Bay Area we always plant a minimum of 10-15 diverse bee plants each season. Higher bee diversity and abundance occurs when gardens have a

rich assortment of bee plants. It also appears that bees remain longer in a garden if plant diversity is high. Finally, we find that patch size of about 1 meter in diameter or larger is best for keeping foraging bees visiting a given plant species or cultivar. Smaller patch sizes, of usually attractive plants, will often be ignored.

Once your bee garden is established, be sure to take time to closely observe the different bee groups/species that will visit your plants. Each bee species behaves slightly differently than all others, which helps in identification. Bee watching can be as enjoyable as bird watching once your eyes get adjusted to their movements. Note also that certain bee groups/species will be predictably found on certain plant types.