

NATIVE PERENNIAL FLOWERS FOR A SUNNY POLLINATOR GARDEN

Beate Popkin

A. Most pollinating insects forage in the sun. Four to six hours of direct sunlight is best. All milkweeds need at least six hours. Shade gardens are often planted with perennials that flower in the spring, before the trees leaf out. These flowers may attract early pollinators including mason bees. There are also fall-flowering asters and goldenrods worth considering for a shade garden.

B. Maintaining a pollinator garden requires diligence. Weed out the invaders! Water new plants to get them established and thereafter when it gets very dry. Apply mulch initially to keep the weeds down and the moisture in the ground.

C. The plant list is organized by plant height with a key to bloom times. Put short plants in front of the garden bed, medium ones in the middle, and the taller plants in the back. The bloom times will help your garden stay colorful all season. These two websites provide detailed information:

Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder:

<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderSearch.aspx>

Lady Bird Johnson Center: <https://www.wildflower.org/>

Bloom time as follows: **Sp** = Spring through May, **S** = Summer, **LS** = Late summer (August to mid-September), **F** = Fall (after mid-September). None of these plants need fertilizer with the possible exception of garden phlox which will produce a second and third bloom with a mid-summer application.

1.) Plants below 1 ft. high for edges and along pavement

Creeping phlox (*Phlox subulata*), **Sp**, drought tolerant

Creeping thyme, **S**, drought tolerant, not native

All oreganos and marjorams, **S**, drought tolerant, not native

2.) Plants 1 – 2 ft. high

Small's beardtongue (*Penstemon smallii*), **Sp**

Eared coreopsis (*Coreopsis auriculata*), **Sp**

Lanceleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*), **Sp** to **S**, drought tolerant

Meadow phlox (*Phlox maculata*), **Sp** to **S**

Downy phlox (*Phlox pilosa*), **S**, drought tolerant

Butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), **S**, drought tolerant, needs full sun

Wild petunia (*Ruellia humilis*), **S**, drought tolerant, flowers open in the morning

Round seeded St. John's Wort (*Hypericum sphaerocarpum*) **S**, a low spreading drought tolerant, shrub with yellow flowers

Spotted St. John's Wort (*Hypericum punctatum*) **S**, similar to above, but with short, bluish dull leaves.

Threadleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*), **S**, drought tolerant

Mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), **LS**, needs moisture, benefits from some shade

3.) Plants 2 ½ to 4 ft. high

Arkansas bluestar (*Amsonia hubrichtii*), **Sp**, drought tolerant
 Eastern bluestar (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*), **Sp**, drought tolerant
 Smooth beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), **Sp to S**
 Indian physic (*Gillenia trifoliata*), **Sp to S**, drought tolerant
 Spiderwort (*Tradescantia*), **S**, long blooming but often aggressive and floppy.
 Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), **S**, needs full sun and moisture
 Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), **S**, leave flower stalks for winter feeding.
 Tennessee coneflower (*Echinacea tennesseensis*), **S**
 Wild quinine (*Parthenium integrifolium*), **S**, prefers some moisture
 Slender mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*), **S**, easily grown
 Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), **S**, drought tolerant
 Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), **S**, drought tolerant; may need staking
 Garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), **S to LS**, needs some moisture
 Short-toothed mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*), **S to LS**, small, fragrant
 flowers attract multiple pollinators
 Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), **LS**, red flowers attract hummingbirds
 Early goldenrod (*Solidago juncea*), **S**,
 Elm-leaf goldenrod (*Solidago ulmifolia*), **LS**
 Gray goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*), **F**
 Scented goldenrod (*Solidago odorata*), **LS**
 Smooth aster (*Aster laevis*), **F**
 Aromatic aster (*Aster oblongifolius*), **F**

4.) Plants 4 ½ to 6 ft. high or higher. These should be planted in full sun with ample space preferably at the back of a bed.

Culver's Root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*) **S**
 Royal catchfly (*Silene regia*), **S**, drought tolerant, pollinated by flies
 Ox-eye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), **S**
 Tall liatris (*Liatris spicata*), **S**, drought tolerant; 'Kobold' is a shorter nativar
 Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), **LS**
 New England aster (*Symphiotrichum novae-angliae*), **LS**, needs moisture, cut back
 in late May/early June for a fuller plant; 'Purple Dome' is a dwarf nativar
 Rosinweed (*Silphium integrifolium*) **LS to F**, easier to grow than cup plant.
 Yellow giant hyssop (*Agastache nepetoides*); **F**
 Purple giant hyssop (*Agastache scrophulariifolia*), **S to LS**

Note: The black-eyed Susan varieties (*Rudbeckia*) were omitted. They don't attract many pollinating insects, but the birds like the seeds and will disperse them. They are showy and provide color to a late-summer garden.

Updated 03-2025, Ann Witherington, M.S. Botany