

## Which Native Plants for Our Insects and Birds?

You want to be part of the solution to the problem of the drastic declines reported amongst our bird and insect populations. You want to create more native plant habitat in your yard to support the insects and birds, but where to start? What should you plant? You may need some initial guidance as you begin to build your native plant knowledge.

We've filtered through many lists of plants to provide a short list of perennials and a few shrubs for most Burlington yards: one list for sunny yards and another list for part shade yards. They will provide diverse shaped flower structures (for different shaped pollinators and pollinator tongues!), pollen and nectar sources, host plant "caterpillar food" and shelter for the largest variety of insects throughout the growing season. Since most Burlington yards have medium to dry, sand or silt loam soils, we've selected plants that will thrive in these conditions. (If you are located in the few areas with clay soils or wet conditions, you'll have to do some additional research.) The partial shade plants can tolerate full shade situations. Only a couple plants listed are not native to Vermont, being found in neighboring states but providing key wildlife resources during the season.

Burlington's many native trees in our natural areas, along the lake shore and planted along our streets, are already providing early season pollen sources, e.g. red maples, willows, cottonwoods, birches, serviceberries and elms. Our list bulks up the mid and late season floral and host plant resources in our city. The late asters and goldenrods are critical nectar and pollen sources for migrating monarch butterflies and overwintering bumble bee queens. Our oaks host hundreds of caterpillar species, especially if we leave their leaves on the ground to protect overwintering pupae.

We recommend planting multiples of the perennials so it's worth the insect's energy to fly to your site, ideally from yard to yard along your street. We've noted which will self-seed, creating new plants for your expanding garden. Look at your whole yard and plan how you can replace some lawn with a little more insect habitat each year, rebuilding natural communities in our city. Once you've had success with these plants, we encourage you to research other natives to add to your gardens as you expand them. We've provided links below. Learn their Latin names and become confident you're getting the right plants. If you can find them, plant the native species vs. named cultivars, which breeders have selected typically for showier flowers, bigger berries or unnatural colored foliage, but which frequently have lost some of their ecological function and attraction to insects.

Lastly, embrace a more natural, "messy" look. Insects need the plant cover, the bare soil areas, the dead stalks, the fallen leaves. You'll hear more insects singing and find more resident and migrating birds foraging for them in your yards as you increase this natural habitat in our neighborhoods!

<b>Basic Native Plants for Sunny Areas - Burlington VT</b>					<b><u>#/108 Sq ft</u></b>	
<b><i>Bloom Season</i></b>	<b><i>Plant Name</i></b>	<b><i>Plant Width</i></b>	<b><i>Plant Height</i></b>	<b><i>Bloom Color</i></b>	<b><u>Plot</u></b>	<b><i>Notes</i></b>
Early	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i> (black chokeberry)	3-6'	4-6'	White	1	A shrub. Named cultivars will still provide floral resources for pollinators and larger berries for you and the birds.
Early-Mid	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i> (foxglove beardtongue)	1.5'	1-3'	White	5	Allow it to reseed. Flower shape important for long-tongued bumble bees.
Mid-Late	<i>Hypericum</i> sp: <i>H. prolificum</i> or <i>H. kalmianum</i> (shrubby St. John's-wort)	3'	3-5'	Yellow	1	Small shrub. Both species are significant pollen sources for multiple insects. Both, though not native to VT, are native in NY and NJ. <i>H. prolificum</i> is a vigorous seeder.
Mid	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> (butterfly milkweed)	1-2'	1-2'	Orange	5	Needs small patches of bare soil to reseed. Monarch butterfly host plant.
Mid	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i> (wild bergamot)	1.5'	2-3'	Pink/Lavender	5	Non-spreading species of bee balm or bergamot
Mid-Late	<i>Pycnanthemum</i> sp: <i>P. tenuifolia</i> (narrow leaf mountain mint) or <i>P. verticillata</i> (whorled mountain mint)	2'	1.5-2.5	White	2	Slowly spreads. Minty, fragrant foliage. Many weeks of floral resources for insects. Will reseed.
Mid-Late	<i>Agastache</i> sp: <i>A. scrophulariifolia</i> (purple giant hyssop) or <i>A. foeniculum</i> (lavender giant hyssop)	1.5-2'	6'	Purple	5	Provides a long season of floral resources to multiple pollinators. They need small patches of bare soil to reseed. <i>A. scrophulariifolia</i> is a rare VT native. <i>A. foeniculum</i> is native to the midwest but an acceptable substitute.

Mid-Late	<i>Eupatorium hyssopifolium</i> (hyssop leaved boneset)	1.5-2'	2-3'	White	3	Native of southern New England that thrives in Burlington's medium to dry, sand/silt soils with many weeks of late season floral resources for pollinators. Modestly self-seeds.
Late	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i> (little bluestem grass)	1-2'	1-3'	Feathery fluff	5	Late season food source. Host plant and habitat provider for a large variety of insects.
Late	<i>Symphotrichum novae-angliae</i> (New England aster)	2-3'	2-4'	Purple/Pink	5	Important nectar resource for migrating Monarchs and next year's bumble bee queens pre-hibernation.

**#/~86 Sq ft**  
**Plot**

**Basic Native Plants for Part Shade Areas - Burlington VT**

<b><i>Bloom Season</i></b>	<b><i>Plant Name</i></b>	<b><i>Plant Width</i></b>	<b><i>Plant Height</i></b>	<b><i>Bloom Color</i></b>		<b><i>Notes</i></b>
Early	<i>Carex pensylvanica</i> (Pennsylvania sedge)	1-1.5'	8"	Green	5	Slowly spreading sedge that supports many butterfly and moth species. Can be a "no-mow" shady lawn alternative.
Early	<i>Zizia aurea</i> (golden Alexanders)	1'	1-2'	Yellow	5	Early season floral resources for short tongued pollinators and host plant for swallowtail caterpillars. Allow it to reseed.
Early-Mid	<i>Geranium maculatum</i> (wild geranium)	1'	1-1.5'	Purple	5	Watch it forcibly eject its seeds to slowly spread. An early season pollinator powerhouse to plant between the later blooming asters.
Early-Mid	<i>Penstemon digitalis</i> (foxglove beardtongue)	1.5'	1-3'	White	5	Allow it to reseed.

Mid	<i>Aralia nudicaulis</i> (American spikenard)	3-4'	3-4'	Pale Green	2	Provides the mass of a shrub but dies back to the ground each winter. Long trusses of flowers, then small berries, and attractive to insects and birds.
Late	<i>Solidago caesia</i> (wreath goldenrod)	1-2'	1.5-2'	Yellow	5	Important nectar source for late season butterflies and next year's bumble bee queens pre-hibernation.
Late	<i>Symphyotrichum lateriflorum</i> (calico aster)	2'	2'	White with purple	5	Important nectar source for late season butterflies and next year's bumble bee queens pre-hibernation.
Late	<i>Symphyotrichum cordifolium</i> (heart-leaved aster)	1.5-2'	1-3'	Light purple	5	Important nectar source for late season butterflies and next year's bumble bee queens pre-hibernation, the latest blooming aster.

## Native Plant Sources:

### **Chittenden County Nurseries**

[Arcana Gardens - Jericho VT](#)

[Full Circle Gardens - Essex VT](#)

[Horsford Gardens and Nursery - Charlotte VT](#)

[Intervale Conservation Nursery - Burlington VT](#)

[River Berry Farm - Fairfax VT](#) (see online presence at Northeast Pollinator Plants below.)

### **Online Nurseries**

[Northeast Pollinator Plants - Fairfax VT](#)

[Prairie Moon Nursery - Winona MN](#)

[Prairie Nursery - Westfield WI](#)

[Toadshade Wildflower Farm - Frenchtown NJ](#)

### **Learn more!**

Continue your education. But first, ***hot off the presses*** is this excellent new book: *[The Pollinator Victory Garden](#)* by Kim Eierman! The author presents an engaging, well-researched summary of everything you need to know to start ecologically gardening and support pollinating insects. Lots of photos and helpful lists and reminders.

The next four sites have plant finder databases or link to a plant list. All have great information and e-newsletters for building your knowledge!

[Native Plant Trust - Plant Finder for New England Natives](#)

[National Wildlife Federation - Plant Finder re: Insects Served](#)

[National Audubon Society - Native Plants for Birds Database](#)

[Xerces Society - Pollinator Plant List for the North East US](#)

[Wild Seed Project](#) A Maine nonprofit providing helpful info on returning more native plants to our roadsides, cities and yards. Also sells regionally sourced seeds.

[Grow Native Massachusetts](#) A Massachusetts nonprofit providing similar helpful information and videos of the monthly talks they host with experts from across the Northeast US.

- *Kate Kruesi is a multi-decade native plant gardener who enjoys observing and simulating the beauty of our wild natural communities.*