

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.

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	Tidytops	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.	

<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	

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

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

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	Peponapsis (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.