Supporting Diverse Bees with Native Plants

Our research

Native plants are popular with gardeners, in part due to their purported benefits to pollinators. Studies have examined the relative attractiveness of regionally relevant native plants to wild bees in other areas of the United States, but no studies were available for plants native to the Pacific Northwest. We conducted a three-year study to identify native Pacific Northwest flowering plants that support robust bee communities. We included lavender in our study, because we wanted to provide a well-known plant for gardeners as a reference, when assessing the bee-friendly nature of native plants.

What we found

Here, we show the number of bee species (richness) of ten plants with the highest diversity in our study, as compared to lavender. The number of bee species on these native study plants far exceeded the number of bee species on lavender. While we saw a high abundance of bees on lavender, especially non-native honey bees and native bumblebees, it was visited by relatively few bee species. We found a richer and more diverse community of bees across 13 of the 19 native plants that we studied, compared to lavender.
The abundance of honey bees on lavender does not necessarily mean it is a poor resource for native bees. *Bombus fervidus*, a native bumble bee listed as “vulnerable” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, visited lavender in high abundance. Another IUCN Red List “vulnerable” and native bumble bee, *Bombus caliginosus*, was only collected from lavender.

### How does this relate to your garden?

Your garden can play an important role in bee conservation.

Gardeners looking to support wild bees should include native plants that are highly attractive to many different bee species. We in the Garden Ecology Lab recommend the ten native plants highlighted in the previous figure: varileaf phacelia, globe gilia, Douglas’ aster, California poppy, farewell to spring, rose checkermallow, common madia, Canada goldenrod, Oregon sunshine, and yarrow.

We also recommend that you plant appropriate non-native plants, such as ‘Grosso’ lavender, which can act as a nectar source for vulnerable bumblebee species. In fact, a future hypothesis we hope to test, is whether co-planting lavender with native plants might actually reduce competition for forage plants in gardens. We suspect that lavender is so attractive to honey bees, that these non-native bees will pass on native plants, creating more foraging opportunities for native and wild bees.

### Additional Information


### Master Gardener™ Advice

- Contact your local extension office for Master Gardener advice, or look for Master Gardeners at local farmers’ markets.
- For more 10-Minute University™ handouts, videos, and the class schedule, visit [https://cmastergardeners.org](https://cmastergardeners.org).

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