

***Why is it important to garden with native species? What are some things I can plant to help out birds, butterflies, and other pollinators on Georgian Bay?***

*Answered by Kate Harries*

I like insects. Butterflies, moths, bees, bugs, beetles, syrphid flies, mayflies, dragonflies, damselflies, and more… mosquitoes and ants maybe less so, but I view it as my responsibility to minimize the harm they can do to me, so I can minimize the harm I do to them. The same applies to wasps and hornets. I try to make space for us all.

Birds like insects too, especially those in the larval stage of their lifecycle, because these are the most nutritious and easily digestible food for chicks. Birds that are normally seed-eaters still turn to insects and their larvae in spring.

There’s a story told by Doug Tallamy, entomology professor at the University of Delaware and author of *Bringing Nature Home*, a seminal book that sounded a clarion call to gardeners to step up and save the planet. Tallamy watched a pair of chickadees flying back and forth to their nest bearing, mostly, caterpillars. He counted, and calculated that they delivered 390-570 caterpillars a day, which over 16-18 days in the nest added up to 6,240-9,120 caterpillars.

One of Doug’s graduate students followed up his findings by monitoring chickadee nests in city neighbourhoods. The areas that had a good proportion of native trees produced healthy fledglings. But in the neighbourhoods where non-native trees predominated, the nestlings did poorly or died. Under the dead chicks, researchers found sunflower seeds that the parents, unable to find the necessary food, had brought from feeders to offer to their young, all in vain.

Butterflies and moths harvest nectar or pollen from a variety of sources, native or non-native. But when it comes to reproduction, ninety per cent of insects that eat plants can

reproduce only on those with which they share an evolutionary history, known as their host plants. For example, milkweed is the host plant of the monarch butterfly.

Bees consume nectar and pollen to make food for larvae that winter in cells, and many will visit natives and non-natives alike. But many others will only collect from a flower to which they are adapted, again through an evolutionary partnership. For example, the sundrop sweat bee only collects from the sundrop.

A word about the honey bee: it is non-native. I am conscious that these European bees are actually an invasive species that can displace our native bees (400 species in Ontario). I also see beekeepers as a powerful voice against the use of insect-killing pesticides and loss of habitat that have led to a precipitous decline in all bee populations. If we all grow lots of native pollinator plants there will be enough for everyone. This

includes government (think parks, highway medians, vacant land), businesses, and institutions.

So what plants are the best for pollinators? See my Top 12 list below. Georgian Bay is magical. Absorb the aesthetic and echo it in the space where you are gardening. Try not to use plants that bring a “city” look to the Shield. Avoid bringing plants from the south; unwanted pests and diseases could hitch a ride. But also don’t use plants that have been sprayed with pesticides—they will poison your pollinators and the birds and other creatures that consume them. Ask at the garden centre: have these plants been sprayed? Are they locally propagated?

Finally, be vigilant against invasive species. European Common Reed (*Phragmites australis subsp. australis*) is spreading through cottage country at an alarming rate. It creates tall monocultures that are no better than pavement at supporting wildlife.

Other invasives that are degrading our wild spaces include Garlic Mustard and Dog-strangling Vine. And then there are the ones people buy—Bishop’s Goutweed, Creeping Bugleweed, Lily of the Valley, English Ivy and Periwinkle. The more common Georgian Bay invasive plants are Sedum, Chives, Field Bindweed and the Phragmites described above. Educate yourself and don’t let these destructive forces gain a foothold in your little patch of paradise.



**Top 12 Georgian Bay pollinator plants**

1. Anise Hyssop *Agastache foeniculum*
2. Cardinal Flower *Lobelia cardinalis*
3. Butterfly Weed *Asclepias tuberosa*
4. Swamp Milkweed *Asclepias incarnata*
5. New England Aster *Symphyotrichum novae angliae*
6. Wild Bergamot *Monarda fistulosa*
7. Spotted Joe Pye Weed *Eutrochium maculatum*
8. Wild Columbine *Aquilegia canadensis*
9. White Baneberry *Actaea pachypoda*
10. White Turtlehead *Chelone glabra*
11. Wild Lupin *Lupinus perennis*
12. Purple Coneflower *Echinacea purpurea*

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