

Romancing the Pollinators



Bumblebee pollinating Fra Dagmar Hastrup Antique Rugosa Rose in Santa Fe. Photo: by Maggie Lee

Several years ago in early November, after a particularly robust monsoon season and as warm weather continued to linger, I sat in the forest along the Big Tesuque Creek—listening to the warbling stream, its edges softened with tussocks of autumnal grasses.

Above me, spires of Douglas Fir punctuated the honey-colored sheen on the gray-green trunks of swaying Aspens. Long arches of these fallen and weathered trees, frame the bare-branched understory of tea-leaved willow, currant and rock spirea—all three pollinator-friendly plants. Dangling seed heads of amber-mauve-hued grasses, ruby-berried Kinnikinnick (AKA bearberries) and ice-blue pussytoes, weave together in this forest enclave. Armed with pencil and paper, I noticed shadows from the low branches of the evergreen fir moving gently across the white pages of my notebook. Nearby, mica sparkled off granite boulders strewn with fallen leaves, twigs and branches, while a spider slid over tufts of grass and an indigo-orange butterfly wafted through the air.

A refreshing sense of comfort seeped in, as I reflected on this constellation of visual cohesiveness and how it reveals the deep ecology of a biologically rich environment, rich in relationship as well as species. The more we observe and experience a variety of habitats from alpine tundra, forest, stream, steppe, chaparral, desert and coastal plains, the greater our capacity to sense this interconnectedness throughout nature. The more this inspires us, the greater the possibility to emulate and practice the spontaneous feeling of nature's tremendous variety of materials, within our own environments.

A garden or habitat rich in mutually beneficial species cultivates a diversity—the connective tissue linking nectar and pollen-producing plants with nectar and pollen-collecting animals. This supports a vital ecological process; through the transfer of pollen a flowering plant is fertilized, allowing reproduction and development of fruit and seed. Coevolution has allowed for floral adaptations that produce a kaleidoscope of shapes, colors, fragrances and nectars designed to attract just the right pollinator.

The North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC), whose stated mission is “to encourage the health of resident and migratory pollinating animals in North America,” in its Pollination Primer (an introductory guide that lays out the fundamentals of plant reproduction and the role of pollinators in this cycle) tells us that “over 200,000 species of animals act as pollinators, many distributing pollen in different ways. Vertebrates, birds or bats carry pollen in their feathers or hair. Invertebrates, bees-wasps, butterflies and moths lack hair, rather have bristles on their legs, head or other body parts. Honeybees have tiny baskets (corbiculae) on their hind legs for carrying pollen back to the hive. When butterflies use their long proboscis or hummingbirds use their long beaks and brush-like tongues to sip nectar from tubular flowers, they get peppered with pollen on their heads or nectar-gathering appendages.”



Agastache rupestris with female broad-tailed hummingbird. Photo: David Salman

Four thousand species of bees are native to North America and pollinate the greatest diversity of plants. Honeybees were introduced here in the early 1600s by European settlers in Jamestown, Virginia. Most rural households and many in towns kept bees as a source of sweetener. With as many as 50,000 leaving the hive at once, they search for nectar stored in the blossoms—its sugar their primary source of energy—and gather pollen, which provides proteins and fats. It is the nectar enriched with enzymes and ferments which is actively concentrated in the hive—that is what becomes the honey. Below are some of my cultivation techniques, a list of plants that attract a wide range of pollinators and suggestions for attracting pollinators. These are tips I've gathered over the years, some from design practices, others from guidelines and all gathered from both personal experience and from the NAPPC and the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

- After a few autumn frosts, pull away mulch from the plants and turn in compost. The autumn is the optimum time for this practice, as it accommodates root growth activity.
- We apply Biodynamic compost (an alternative agricultural practice originally developed by Rudolf Steiner in 1924. BD concepts were brought to America by Dr. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer in the 1930's, while the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association was founded in 1938). The compost preparations are six specially made, plant derived substances incorporated into a built pile—(refer to [Terra Simpatico](#) on the author's website writings page, for a fuller description) and amendments into the soil. Colorful, fragrant leaves from ash, crabapple, fruit trees, linden, locust, maple and redbud are collected and used for mulch - putting the garden to sleep beautifully.
- In the spring, remaining leaves can be crumbled & left or removed.

- Often during the summer, I will stir up a mixture of milk, honey and water to bring the beneficial insects and spray it onto the plants. Hugh Courtney, founder of the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics (based in Floyd, Virginia) recommended I try this—and it's something I've continued to employ, as it has been incredibly effective. Hugh transitioned in June of 2020 at the age of 87, but he'd been creating these preparations since 1982. In an interview I had with him in 2005, he described the dynamic rather than the physical properties of the preps. "With biodynamic agriculture and preps, we are asked to think in terms of carrier of forces, rather than substances. Just as the effects of the forces of magnetism or gravity can be observed without actually being able to see these forces, so to we can recognize through their effects, the forces which are released through the use of biodynamic preps."

Continuing with the milk and honey application, I have found it brings tremendous activity, especially among the bees and some butterflies and hummingbirds, who come to pollinate the flowers. This reciprocal relationship is as invigorating, as it is nourishing for the pollinators, the plants and the soil they grow in. A win-win for us all.

Tips for attracting pollinators:

1. Most pesticides are not selective; some actually kill off beneficial plants and insects along with the peskier ones. Honeybees, for example, love dandelions, which is often the first herb many folks will first try to eradicate from growing in their lawn.
2. The plant list included here indicates host plants for beneficial insects. Experiment and combine with companion planting for orchards and vegetable gardens and with permaculture plant guilds.
3. Include waterwise, native, adaptive, homeoclimatic (similar soil and climate around the world) and habitat-friendly plants that are well suited to local growing conditions. Some homeoclimatic plant selections include de-



losperma from the Eastern Cape province, South Africa; *salvia daghestanica* endemic to N. Caucasus in southernmost Russia and *salvia jurisicii* from North Macedonia. Insert pictured here with *Aethionema grandiflorum* (Persian Stonecress) and *Salvia jurisicii* at Ava and David Salman's Santa Fe Greenhouses trial area circa 2015-photo by Maggie Lee; *Teucrium cossini* and *sideritis syriaca* from the mountains of Greece. Refer to Plant Driven Design, p. 113-114 for extended description of homeoclimatic plants.

4. Observe the microclimates within your garden - noting that what you can plant in an East exposure is quite different from what works best in a West environment. This allows for several unique habitats within the same garden space. Choose plants compatible in moisture and cultural needs. Learn their growth habits and sociability status to avoid one plant overtaking its neighbor. I find the most profound garden designers have a thorough knowledge, understanding and years of experience in this particular aspect of plant cultivation.

5. Heirloom varieties of herbs and perennials provide good foraging. Hybridization has reduced the production of nectar and pollen and sometimes leaves the resulting plant completely sterile—as in those that end up as double flowers—which is useless to bees and other pollinators.

6. Choose several selections of colors in your flowers. Bees have good color vision and are especially attracted to blue, purple, violet, white and yellow. They like petals with “nectar guides”—colored stripes, spots and markings—that direct them right to the sweet stuff. For example, morning glories, violets and foxgloves. Butterflies favor orange, yellow, bright pink and blue flowers and they often seek out flowers that match their own color so as to camouflage themselves from birds. Hummingbirds seek red, orange and yellow flowers. Moths search out white flowers, especially fragrant bloomers.



A Monarch butterfly on an Asclepias Tubarosa in Santa Monica - Photo: Lauri Gaffin

7. Planting in drifts comprised of one species will attract more pollinators than individual plants scattered throughout a habitat patch. The size of the drift relates to the size of your garden. If space allows, plant drifts of 4' or larger in diameter. Aim toward an artful randomness of varying densities reflective of a wild meadow. Leave open space nearby your garden/meadow, which will benefit from the additional nectar-pollen available from forage

plants in the surrounding landscape. As a design element, this transitional link can lift and lead the eye to wider views, inviting a sense of reference, while lending a gentle naturalness and visual cohesiveness.

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9. Create a dynamic relationship between structure plants—materials with strong form, i.e. crabapples or cutleaf smooth sumac trees; shrubs like manzanita, utah serviceberry, wavyleaf oak, viburnums and waxflower; fiber



plants like yucca pallida and rostrata; spires of formative grasses or mature lavender and rosemary plants. Globe shapes, as in those of echinops or eryngium yuccifolium (the rattlesnake master); [Photo above are wasps pollinating eryngium yuccifolium by Janet Davis taken somewhere in Canada;](#) or an artichoke plant; and flat flower heads as in yarrow or echinacea.

Contrast these choices with shorter lived spring bloomers and supportive fillers. For example, species bulbs and iris, aubrieta, phlox, pasque flowers, blue flax, nepeta, poppies, penstemon, sulfur buckwheat, verbena, chocolate flower, gaura, liatris, salvias, especially late season cobalt salvia grandiflora. Drifts of grasses both, native/ adaptive and ornamental, tie the ensemble together.

10. Plant for flower diversity displayed over a long season, from the earliest prairie smoke, wallflowers and currants, to late season asters and chamisa. Eighty percent of all birds like sunflowers. This diversity supports a range



of pollinators flying at different times of the season. [Swallowtail Butterfly on Butterfly Bush photo by Brian Molk, La Posada Hotel, Santa Fe, NM](#)

11. Provide shelter, nesting areas and feeders for birds and other pollinators—from wooden nesting blocks, hummingbird feeders, small water features, a large boulder for butterflies to sun upon or arbors covered with vines. Birds in our area that also seek out nectar include hummingbirds, both broad-tailed and black-chinned, warblers, Western tanagers and ladder-backed woodpeckers. Consider planting trees - from lindens, maples, oaks, pines and spruces - that provide gleaming sticky resins, saps and gums for birds' nesting materials. Bees collect the resins as a raw material and when combined in specific manner, becomes propolis - bee glue - to line the hive to form a protective, anti-microbial envelope.

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Sadly, as grasslands, fields and forest disappear, so do their pollinators. Let's help balance this loss of habitat by practicing restorative ecology, establishing pollinator-friendly gardens, a protective refuge where pollinators may live by their intrinsic nature. We can also celebrate during the third week in June each year, with the NAPPC. They sponsor events to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators in our daily lives. [Their 19th annual event this year \(2026\) is from June 22nd through 28th.](#)

The bees pollinate the clover and alfalfa which the dairy cows eat, producing the milk and cheese we enjoy. In the realm of nature, no process is closer to the heart of life than pollinator partnership.

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9. Towards Savings the Honeybee by Gunther Hauk, 2002, Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, 2nd edition 2017; Spikenard Honeybee Sanctuary - spikenardfarm.org
10. Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, xerces.org

Plants which attract a wide range of pollinators-

*Host plants for N.M. beneficials

Trees:

Alder-Thinlea

Birch-Western and Paper

Chokecherry*

Cottonwood-Aspen, Narrowleaf and
Plains*

Crab Apples*

Desert Olive-NM Privet*

Desert Willow*

Firs- Rocky Mt. and White*

Fruit Trees:

Apple, Apricots, Cherry, Peach, Plum*

Hackberry-Western*

Hawthorn*

Juniper-Rocky Mt. and One-Seed*

Linden*

Maples-Bigtooth*

Mountain Mahogany-Cut-leaf*

Oaks-Bur and Chinquapin*

Pine-Bristlecone, Limber, Lodgepole,

Pinyon, Ponderosa and White*

Redbud

Robinia-Locust Purple Robe and New

Mexico Locust*

Serviceberry-western

Spruce-Blue and White*

Willow-Peachleaf*

Shrubs:

Agaves*

Aloes-Aristata

Antelope Bitterbrush*

Apache Plume*

Artemisia-Sagebrush*

Beauty Bush*

Berberis-Oregon grape-Desert Holly*

Blue M. Spirea*

Buckthorn- Smith's

Buffaloberry-Silver

Butterfly Bush*

Cactus-Blue Barrel, Cholla, Hedgehog,

Claret Cup, Opuntia-Beavertail and

Snowball*

Chamisa-Rabbitbrush*

Cliff Fendlerbush*

Current- Clove-Golden and Wax*

Dogwood-Red Twigged*

Elderberry*

Fernbush*

Four-Wing Saltbrush*

Jasmine-Winter

Juniper*

Leadplant*

Lilac*

Manzanita x colorandensis*

Mock Orange

Nanking Cherry*

Ninebark*

Oak-Gambel and Wavyleaf*
Quince-flowering
Rockspray-Rock Spirea*
Russian Sage*
Sand Cherry*
Smoke bush*
Snowberry*
Sumac-some varieties*
Utah Serviceberry
Viburnum*
Waxflower*
Winterfat*
Yucca-Banana, Narrowleaf, Plains and Red*

Perennials:

Agastache - Anise hyssop*
Allium-ornamental*
Alyssum - Mountain*
Artemisia*
Asters-Aromatic, Heath, Smooth Blue*
Aubrieta*
Baptisia*
Blackfooted Daisy*
Blanketflower-Indian Blanket*
Broomweed*
Butterfly Weed*
Calif. Fuchsia-Hummingbird Trumpet*
Checkermallow*
Chocolate Flower*
Clematis-non vining - Integrifolia Mon-
golian Bells, Scott's, Sugarbowl's*
Purple and White Prairie Clover*
Crocus chrysanthus-Snow crocus and
Tommasinianus*

Delosperma*
Desert Four O'Clocks*
Dianthus*
Eremurus - Foxtail Lily
Echinacea-augustifolia and pallida*
Echinops*
Erigeron-Cutleaf Daisy*
Eryngium-Sea Holly and yuccifolium-
Rattlesnake Master*
Euphorbia's - some
Evening Primrose-Oenothera's*
Flameflower
Gaura
Germander-fruity*
Geum-Prairie Smoke*
Goldenrod*
Hollyhock*
Iris-Snow Iris and Bearded hybrids*
Jupiter's beard-Greek valerian*
Liatris-Prairie Gayfeather*
Lobelia-James Red Cardinal Flower
Lupine - Silvery*
Monarda*
Muscari species-Grape Hyacinth*
Nepata*
Pansy - Corsican and many hybrids
Pasque Flower*
Penstemons*
Phlox-kelseyi, nana, subulata*
Phlomis*
Plumbago-Leadwort
Poppy Atlanticum, Horned, Oriental*
Purple Mountain Savory*
Rudbeckia*
Salvias- Azurea, Dorii, Mojave, Platinum,
Silver Sage*

Sedums and Sempervivum*
 Scabiosa*
 Sideritis syriaca*
 Skyrocket
 Stachys*
 Sulfur Flower, Buckwheat*
 Sunflower-Maximilian*
 Thermopsis-Golden Banner*
 Tulip- dwarf species like batalini, Persian- clusiana 'Lady Jane' and kaufmanniana*

some Verbena's - refer to annuals
 Veronica - bombycina, incana, thymoides, Turkish*
 Wallflower*
 Winecup*
 Yarrow*
 Zinnia-Rocky Mountain*

Herb/Fruit/Vegetable

Allium*
 Basil*
 Artichoke
 Borage*
 Broccoli*
 Calendula*
 Carrots-seeded*
 Celery-seeded*
 Chamomile*
 Comfrey*
 Dill*
 Fennel*
 Geranium
 Hyssop*
 Kale-seeded*
 Lavender*
 Lemon Balm*
 Marjoram*
 Mints* - best in containers

Mentha longifolia (Blue leafed variety)
 Oregano*
 Parsley*
 Radish-seeded*
 Raspberry
 Rosemary*
 Sage*
 Savories*
 Scarlet Runner Bean*
 Stinging Nettle*
 Strawberry and Alpine- Alexandra*
 Thymes*
 Valerian*

Vines:

Clematis* pitcheri, tangutica, texensis
 Scarlet Leather flower; some hybrids
 Sweet Autumn*
 Grapes*
 Honeysuckle*
 Roses*

Virginia creeper-Woodbine*
Silver Lace*
Trumpet*
Wisteria*

Annuals, Biennials and Short- lived Perennials

Coreopsis*
Cosmos*
Desert Bluebell - Phacelia***
Larkspur*
Marigolds***
Moon Carrot

Nasturtiums***
Queen Anne's Lace*
Poppies-California*, corn, Opium "Lau-
ren's Grape
Snapdragon*
Sweet Alysum***
Sunflowers*
Tithonia*
Verbena*
Viola-Corsican pansies

Maggie Lee
gardengaia.com

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Birch-Western and Paper

Chokecherry*

Cottonwood-Aspen, Narrowleaf and Plains*

Crab Apples*

Desert Olive-NM Privet*

Desert Willow*

Firs- Rocky Mt. and White*

Fruit Trees:

Apple, Apricots, Cherry, Peach, Plum*
Hackberry-Western*
Hawthorn*
Juniper-Rocky Mt. and One-Seed*
Linden*
Maples-Bigtooth*
Mountain Mahogany-Cut-leaf*
Oaks-Bur and Chinquapin*
Pine-Bristlecone, Limber, Lodgepole, Pinyon, Ponderosa and White*
Redbud
Robinia-Locust Purple Robe and New Mexico Locust*
Serviceberry
Spruce-Blue and White*
Willow-Peachleaf*

SHRUBS:

Agaves*
Aloes-Aristata
Apache Plume*
Artemisia-Sagebrush*
Beauty Bush*
Berberis-Oregon grape-Desert Holly*
Blue M. Spirea*
Buckthorn- Smith's
Buffaloberry-Silver
Butterfly Bush*
Cactus-Blue Barrel, Cholla, Hedgehog, Claret Cup, Opuntia-Beavertail
and Snowball*
Chamisa-Rabbitbrush*

Cliff Fendlerbush*
Current- Clove-Golden and Wax*
Dogwood-Red Twigged*
Elderberry*
Fernbush*
Four-Wing Saltbrush*
Jasmine-Winter
Juniper*
Leadplant*
Lilac*
Manzanita x colorandensis*
Mock Orange
Nanking Cherry*
Ninebark*
Oak-Gambel and Wavyleaf*
Quince-flowering
Rockspray-Rock Spirea*
Russian Sage*
Sand Cherry*
Smoke bush*
Snowberry*
Sumac-some varieties*
Viburnum*
Waxflower*
Winterfat*
Yucca-Banana, Narrowleaf, Plains and Red*

PERENNIALS:

Agastache - Anise hyssop*
Allium-ornamental*

Alyssum - Mountain*

Artemisia*

Asters-Aromatic, Heath, Smooth Blue*

Aubrieta*

Baptisia*

Blackfooted Daisy*

Blanketflower-Indian Blanket*

Broomweed*

Butterfly Weed*

California Fuchsia-Hummingbird Trumpet*

Checkermallow*

Chocolate Flower*

Clematis-non vining - Integrifolia Mongolian Bells, Scott's, Sugarbowl's*

Crocus chrysanthus-Snow crocus and Tommasinianus*

Delosperma*

Desert Four O'Clocks*

Dianthus*

Eremurus - Foxtail Lily

Echinacea-augustifolia and pallida*

Echinops*

Erigeron-Cutleaf Daisy*

Eryngium-Sea Holly and yuccifolium-Rattlesnake Master*

Evening Primrose-Oenothera's*

Flameflower

Gaura

Germander-fruity*

Geum-Prairie Smoke*

Goldenrod*

Hollyhock*

Iris-Snow Iris and Bearded hybrids*

Jupiter's beard-Greek valerian*
Liatris-Prairie Gayfeather*
Lobelia-Jemez Red Cardinal Flower
Lupine*
Monarda*
Muscari species-Grape Hyacinth*
Nepata*
Pansy - Corsican and many hybrids
Pasque Flower*
Penstemons*
Phlox-kelseyí, nana, subulata*
Phlomis*
Plumbago-Leadwort
Poppy Atlanticum- Corn, Horned ,Opium - Lauren's Grape, Oriental*
Purple Mountain Savory*
Purple Prairie Clover*
Rudbeckia*
Salvias- Azurea, Dorii, Mojave, Platinum, Silver Sage*
Sedums and Sempervivum*
Scabiosa*
Sideritis syriaca *
Stachys*
Sulfur Flower, Buckwheat*
Sunflower-Maximilian*
Thermopsis-Golden Banner*
Tulip- dwarf species like Persian
clusiana 'Lady Jane' and kaufmanniana*
some Verbena's -refer to annuals
Veronica - bombycina, incana, thymoides , Turkish*
Viola-Corsican pansy

Wallflower*

Winecup*

Yarrow*

Zinnia-Rocky Mountain*

HERBS/VEGETABLES:

Allium*

Basil*

Artichoke

Borage*

Broccoli*

Calendula*

Carrots-seeded*

Celery-seeded*

Chamomile*

Comfrey*

Dill*

Fennel*

Geranium

Hyssop*

Kale-seeded*

Lavender*

Lemon Balm*

Marjoram*

Mints*

Oregano*

Parsley*

Radish-seeded*

Raspberry

Rosemary*

Sage*
Savories*
Scarlet Runner Bean*
Stinging Nettle*
Strawberry - non vining Alexandra *
Thymes*
Valerian*

VINES:

Clematis* pitcheri, tangutica, texensis -Scarlet Leatherflower; some hybrids
Sweet Autumn*
Grapes*
Honeysuckle*
Roses*
Virginia creeper-Woodbine*
Silver Lace*
Trumpet*
Wisteria*

ANNUALS AND SHORT LIVED PERENNIALS:

Coreopsis*
Cosmos*
Desert Bluebell - Phacelia***
Larkspur*
Marigolds***
Nasturtiums***
Queen Anne's Lace*
Poppies-california*
Snapdragon*

Sweet Alyssum***

Sunflowers*

Tithonia*

Verbena* bipinnatifida, bonariensis 'Buenos Aires', canadensis, tenuisecta
wrightii

Violets and Pansies

Maggie Lee

Terra Flora Garden Design

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