

Native Plants in Flower Gardens:

Beauty for Bouquets, Strength for Ecosystems

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Briana Selstad Bosch is the founder of Blossom and Branch Farm, a two-acre microfarm in Colorado that uses organic and regenerative processes to grow flowers and native plants that provide habitat for wildlife and pollinators. She teaches regenerative gardening in workshops online and in person, and shares her content with her audience @blossomandbranchfarm.

Plant Native Plants to Attract Beneficial Insects

Having a diverse range of native plants assists the garden by attracting a range of beneficial insects and parasitic wasps. While nonnative plants are capable of attracting beneficials, albeit to a lesser extent, native plants excel at it. But look up “beneficial plants” for interplanting in the garden, and you’ll get a laundry list of nonnatives (and even invasives): dill, fennel, nasturtium, sweet alyssum. While yes, these nonnatives can be part of any good biodiversity planting in the garden, native beneficial plants have coevolved over millions of years alongside the native beneficial insects that thrive in and support our garden climates and ecosystems. In some cases, insects—like the monarchs, which require milkweed to survive—will only eat or reproduce on specific native plants.

Native plants differ by location and eco-region. For best results, seek out plants that are specifically native to your state or a neighboring state with a similar climate. (When discussing native plants, we typically don’t differentiate by USDA Hardiness Zones, which are based on temperature ranges, not regional characteristics.)

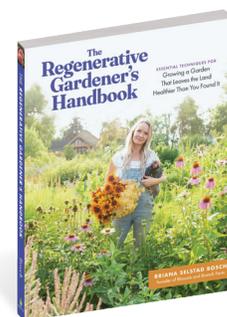


Rudbeckia triloba, blue grama, agastache, and sunflowers in the foreground with switchgrasses and native prairie behind provide a healthy buffet for beneficial insects to guard the vegetable garden and nearby greenhouse.

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Storey Publishing



North American Native Plants for Attracting Beneficial Insects

Common Name(s)	Botanical Name	Soil Preference	Beneficials Attracted	Annual or Perennial	USDA Hardiness Zones	Notes
Annual buckwheat	<i>Eriogonum annuum</i>	Dry	Big-eyed bugs, damsel bugs, lacewings, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, tachinid flies, and more	Mostly annual	Varies	Can be an aggressive self-seeder
Aster	<i>Symphotrichum</i> species	Varied	Damsel bugs, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, soldier beetles, tachinid flies	Perennial	3–8	Late, delicate flowers
Common boneset	<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	Damp	Damsel bugs, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, tachinid flies	Perennial	3–8	Tolerant of sun and shade; best if purchased as plants
Common sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	Dry	Assassin bugs, big-eyed bugs, lacewings, minute pirate bugs, predatory stink bugs, robber flies, soldier beetles, spiders, and more	Annual	n/a	Can reseed prolifically; good for attracting birds
Common yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Dry	Damsel bugs, lacewings, ladybugs, parasitic wasps, syrphid flies	Perennial	3–8	Spreads readily
Coreopsis, tickseed	<i>Coreopsis</i> species	Dry	Lacewings, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, soldier beetles, spiders	Short-lived perennial	3–8	Long flowering period
Coyote brush	<i>Baccharis pilularis</i>	Dry	Lacewings, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, syrphid flies	Perennial	Species dependent	Good for hedgerows (evergreen shrub)
Culver's root	<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>	Average–wet	Minute pirate bugs, native bees, parasitic wasps, syrphid flies	Perennial	3–8	Small white spike flowers
Cup plant, compass plant	<i>Silphium perfoliatum</i>	Dry	Lacewings, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, soldier bugs, spiders	Perennial	3–9	Very tall, spreader; may take over smaller gardens
False aster	<i>Boltonia asteroides</i>	Dry	Big-eyed bugs, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, tachinid flies, soldier beetles, syrphid flies	Perennial	4–9	Many cultivars available
Golden alexanders	<i>Zizia aurea</i>	Average–wet	Parasitic flies, parasitic wasps, soldier beetles, and countless others	Perennial	4–9	Yellow umbel flowers
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> species	Average–moist	Assassin bugs, big-eyed bugs, damsel bugs, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, soldier beetles, spiders, syrphid flies, and others	Perennial	4–9	Beautiful blooms in late summer/early fall

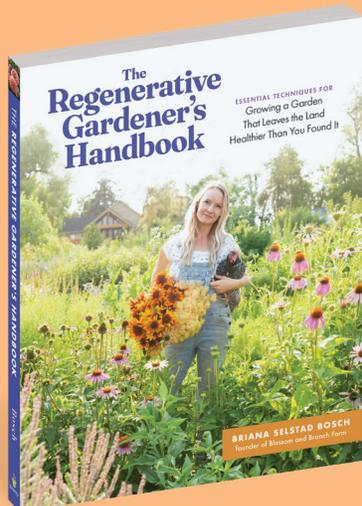
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Heart-leaved meadow parsnip, heartleaf alexanders	<i>Zizia aptera</i>	Dry–average	Countless beneficials	Perennial	4–9	A dryland version of golden alexander with yellow umbel flowers
Hoary vervain	<i>Verbena stricta</i>	Average	Damsel bugs, lacewings, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, spiders	Short-lived perennial	3–7	Easy to start from seed
Lacy phacelia, fiddleneck	<i>Phacelia tanacetifolia</i>	Dry–average	Parasitic wasps (some), syrphid flies, tachinid flies	Annual	n/a	Long blooming; can be used as cover crop
Low calamint	<i>Clinopodium arkansanum</i>	Medium	Countless beneficials	Perennial	4–8	Tolerates shallow/rocky soils
Meadowsweet	<i>Spiraea alba</i>	Average–wet	Assassin bugs, damsel bugs, ground beetles, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, and others	Perennial	4–9	Deciduous shrub; beautiful white blooms for pollinators
Mountain mint	<i>Pycnanthemum</i> species	Average–moist	Countless beneficials	Perennial	3–9	Spreads, but not aggressive like common mint
Pinnate prairie coneflower, gray-headed coneflower	<i>Ratibida pinnata</i>	Average	Damsel bugs, lacewings, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, soldier beetles, spiders, syrphid flies, tachinid flies	Perennial	3–9	Prefers lean soil
Rudbeckia	<i>Rudbeckia</i> species	Dry–average	Parasitic wasps (some), soldier beetles, syrphid flies, tachinid flies	Depends on variety	Depends on variety	Great cut flowers
Shrubby cinquefoil	<i>Dasiphora fruticosa</i> ssp. <i>floribunda</i>	Varied	Lacewings, ladybugs, minute pirate bugs, parasitic wasps, syrphid flies	Perennial	2–7	Evergreen shrub
Smooth oxeye	<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>	Varied	Ladybugs, lacewings, parasitic wasps, soldier beetles, syrphid flies, tachinid flies	Perennial	3–9	Prone to aphid attacks, which in turn attract those insects that eat aphids
Spotted bee balm, horsemint	<i>Monarda punctata</i>	Dry	Countless beneficials	Perennial	4–9	Deer resistant, stunning flower



The Regenerative Gardener's Handbook Essential Techniques for Growing a Garden That Leaves the Land Healthier Than You Found It

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