

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
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HORTICULTURE EDUCATION
Annette Meyer Heisdorffer, PhD
Daviness County Extension Office

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Include Bee-Friendly Trees and Shrubs in the Landscape

When thinking about flowers for pollinators, generally herbaceous perennials and annual flowering plants come to mind. However, trees and shrubs serve as food sources for bees as well. Remember, these insects serve an important role in pollinating food crops such as apples, cucumbers, squashes, pumpkins, and almonds to name a few.

In a scientific study, Dr. Daniel Potter, University of Kentucky Entomologist, and graduate student, Bernadette M. Mach, counted the number of visits made by bees to flowers of trees and shrubs. The bees included many different native bees, such as the mason bee, and the non-native honeybee. As a result, bee-friendly trees and shrubs were identified.

An early blooming large shrub to tree visited by bees is the Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*). This tree is covered with three-quarter-inch clusters of flowers in March. Each flower is surrounded by tiny yellow bracts, which are modified leaves. In full bloom, even though the bracts are small, the tree stands out in the landscape with the yellow color. The plant reaches 15 to 25 feet tall with a spread of 15 to 20 feet. Bright red fruits are produced in the summer. The grayish-brown bark exfoliates on the older branches providing another interesting characteristic to the landscape. The

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Cornelian cherry prefers to grow in good, well-drained soil and can grow in partial shade to full sun.

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is a native, bee-friendly tree, which blooms around April. The half-inch long, reddish-purple flowers are produced on the branches before the leaves appear. Flowers are often found on the trunk too. As an added feature, attractive, brown, flat seed pods often stay on the tree until the following spring. Redbud grows well in sun or shade and is best used as an understory tree. The soil should be well drained. Verticillium wilt and borers are sometimes a problem with redbuds, especially on sites with many stress factors.

Flowering crabapple (*Malus* hybrids) trees are covered with clusters of flowers in the spring. Crabapple trees range in height from 10 to 30 feet depending on the cultivar. With many cultivars available, flower color selection includes white or pink to rosy red. An added interest is the fruit which turns yellow to red in color and varies in size from 0.375 to 2 inches. Some trees have attractive, small, persistent fruit while others have larger fruit that falls early and creates litter. It is best to plant crabapples away from sidewalks and driveways so you will not walk on the fruits.

Disease resistance is an important consideration when selecting a crabapple cultivar. Many cultivars are very susceptible to apple scab, fire blight, cedar apple rust, and powdery mildew. Apple scab causes the leaves to fall off the tree early in the season. Fire blight can quickly kill a crabapple tree if it does not have resistance to this disease. Information about disease-resistant cultivars

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studied at the University of Kentucky is available in "The Flowering Crabapple" publication at the website <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id68/id68.pdf> or from your county Cooperative Extension Service office.

The common winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, is a deciduous holly and blooms during June. The flowers are small with white petals and appear in groups. An added bonus for the landscape is the many bright red fruits that persist into winter. Male flowers and female flowers are produced on different plants so the holly depends on pollinators. In order to have berries, one male plant is planted among several female plants. The slow to medium-growing shrub can reach 6 to 8 feet in height and width. The plant has good fall leaf color as well. This holly tolerates wet conditions and prefers an acidic soil. It grows in full sun and partial shade. Cultivars are available that reach different heights and widths.

Summersweet clethra (*Clethra alnifolia*) is a shrub that blooms in June and July with white flowers attached up and down a 2- to 6-inch long stem. Individual flowers are .33 inch wide. The flowers open first at the bottom of the stem where the blossoms are attached and continue up the stem to the tip resulting in a long blooming period. Flowers are fragrant. The height of the shrub ranges from 3 to 8 feet tall and spreads 4 to 6 feet wide. Basically, if it is growing in conditions the plant prefers, it will grow bigger. Clethra prefers a moist to wet soil and thrives in partial shade to full sun.

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Glossy abelia (*Abelia xgrandiflora*) blooms during the summer months of July through August and possibly into September. The flowers are shaped like a funnel and are white with a hint of pink. Flowers appear on new growth. The plant forms a mounding habit. It can grow 3 to 6 feet tall and wide. Abelia prefers an acidic soil that is well-drained.

For more information about bee-friendly trees and shrubs to plant this fall, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

“Woody Ornamentals for Bee-Friendly Landscapes (Ohio Valley Region)” is a list of other trees and shrubs that are visited by pollinator. It is available at https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/files/bee_friendly_shrubs_and_trees_handout.pdf or through your County Cooperative Extension Service Office. Plants on the list have other desirable landscape characteristics as well for your garden. If you do not want bees close to the house or spaces used often in the landscape, consider planting them in the part of the landscape where you do not frequently visit or work.

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