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Plan Now to Cut Down on Lawn Care Next Summer

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Tired of lawn care?

Mowing and feeding and caring for an expanse of classic green grass costs time and money and, in some cases, can also take a toll on the environment if pesticides and herbicides are used.

Consider this: You can help a bee, butterfly, or bird by filling lawn spaces with some of these seven asters, seven goldenrods, three perennials, four ornamental grasses, three shrubs, and one small tree below.

These 25 natives provide autumn nectar, pollen, seeds, berries, stalks, nesting materials, and habitat.

They are also pleasing to see.

Each description notes how these plants help wildlife, based on information from authoritative websites including www.Wildflower.org, www.Xerces.org, gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org, and www.audubon.org/native-plants. Some of these plants were evaluated by the Chicago Botanic Garden (CBG) for their performance as landscape plants, so we name the top performers here.

Seven Asters

New England aster, *Symphotrichum novae-angliae*, is a top source of sustenance for bees, particularly bumblebees, and butterflies. It hosts larvae for two butterfly species and attracts 12 species of birds. Grows to 4.5' tall, though there are some shorter cultivars. Dry to moist soil, full sun.

Calico aster, *Symphotrichum lateriflorum*, is medium-size aster that prefers moist soil and can tolerate some shade. CBG plant evaluations named the 'Lady in Black' variety a top performer. The plant attracts more pollinator species than some larger asters, has special value to native bees, and attracts 12 species of birds.

New York aster, *Symphotrichum novae-belgii*, including the dwarf 'Wood's Blue', has special value to native bees.

Smooth aster, *Symphotrichum leave*, has special value to native bees and attracts 12 species of birds.

Aromatic aster, *Symphotrichum oblongifolium*, is one of the latest bloomers. A top performer in CBG evaluations, it also has special value to native bees.

White wood aster, *Eurybia divaricata*, is a shade-tolerant, medium-size plant that was a top performer in CBG plant evaluations. It has special value to butterflies.

Heath aster, *Symphotrichum ericoides*, is a compact plant that loves a sunny, rocky terrain and has special value to native bees. The low-growing variety 'Snow flurry' thrives in rock gardens and was a top performer in CBG plant evaluations.

Seven Deer-Resistant Goldenrods

Showy goldenrod, *Solidago speciosa*, is a very late bloomer with special value to both native bees and honeybees. It attracts 12 species of birds. Only 2.5' tall.

Gray goldenrod, *Solidago nemoralis*, grows where little else will. This plant attracts 12 species of birds and supports both honeybees and native bees. About 2.5'.

Flat-top goldenrod, *Euthamia graminifolia*, has broad flower-heads of special value to native bees. About 4' tall.

Zig-zag goldenrod, *Solidago flexicaulis*, thrives in dappled shade and offers special value to native bees and honeybees. About 2.5' tall. The 'Variegata' cultivar was a CBG top performer.

Seaside goldenrod, *Solidago sempervirens*, thrives in wet or dry conditions and can even tolerate salt. It has special value to native bees and honeybees. About 5' tall.

Licorice goldenrod, *Solidago odora*, has special value to native bees and honeybees, and also attracts 12 species of birds. About 3' tall.

Rough-leaved goldenrod, *Solidago rugosa*, has special value to native bees, honeybees, and 12 species of birds. The 'Fireworks' cultivar was a CBG top performer. About 4.5' tall.

Three Late-Flowering Perennials

Helen's flower, *Helenium autumnale*, is also called sneezeweed because of old-time associations with snuff. The long-lasting blossoms grow best in and around ponds, lakes, and streams. The plant attracts butterflies and has special value to native bees. Deer resistant. About 3.5' tall.

White snakeroot, *Ageratina altissima*, used to be called Chocolate Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium rugosum*). This deer-resistant, late-blooming spreader thrives in dappled shade. It attracts late-foraging bees and predatory insects that help reduce pest insect populations. The 'Chocolate' cultivar was a top performer in CBG evaluations. About 2.5' tall.

Hardy ageratum, blue boneset, or blue mistflower, *Conoclinium coelestinum*, is of special value to native bees and attracts butterflies. About 3.5' feet.

Four Native Grasses

Little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*, is a rock star among natives, providing nesting material and structures for bees, acting as a larval host for six native butterflies, and attracting twelve bird species. About 4' tall.

Indiangrass, *Sorghastrum nutans*, provides cover, nesting material, and seeds to ground-feeding birds, attracts butterflies, and is a larval host to one butterfly species. About 5' tall.

Switchgrass, *Panicum virgatum*. Provides cover, nesting material, and seeds to ground-feeding birds. It hosts skipper butterflies' larvae. Different varieties grow between 3' to 5'.

Prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolepis*, provides nesting materials for native bees. Great fall color, great groundcover, great edging. Grows to 2'.

Three Shrubs

Brilliant red chokeberry, *Aronia arbutifolia*, and black chokeberry, *Aronia melanocarpa*, offer abundant berries in late summer and brilliant red foliage in fall. Both provide berries for birds in late fall and winter.

Sweet pepperbush, *Clethra alnifolia*, offers sweet scents and abundant flowers in August, brilliant golden leaves in October to early December. It offers fall food and forage to native bees, native bumblebees, and honeybees. Butterflies and hummingbirds also frequent the plant for nectar. Many birds and small mammals eat the fruit.

Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, offers decorative red berries in late summer that last late into fall and sometimes until March, when hungry birds are happy for the food. Winterberry provides cover and nesting for birds, nectar for butterflies. It is a larval host to one butterfly.

One Small Native Tree

Witch hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*, offers yellow flowers in October and November and is our latest blooming regional native plant. It supports native bees as they forage on warm fall days. Twelve bird species visit witch hazel for seeds. It prefers average soil and moisture, and can tolerate a bit of shade. Grows to 20'.

Visit zip06.com and search on the headline of this story to view more photos of the plants listed.

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