

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



November 1, 2025

Select Trees and Shrubs for the Bees to Plant in the Landscape

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When selecting trees and shrubs for the landscape, consider not only matching the plant to the growing site, but also their benefits as a food source for pollinators. Many food crops, such as apples, cucumbers, squashes, pumpkins, and almonds, to name a few, depend on pollinators to develop the produce we eat.

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

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

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Dwarf fothergilla, *Fothergilla gardenia*, is a shrub reaching 1.5 to 3 feet tall and 2 to 4 feet wide. The shrub grows slowly and forms a compact, mounded growth habit. The white flower is 1.5 to 2 inches long and about 1 inch wide. It looks like a bottlebrush since there are no petals, and the stamens are the showy part of the flower. The blooms open in April and last for about 2 to 3 weeks. They open a little ahead of the leaves emerging in the spring. Leaves are blue-green in color during the growing season. In the fall, leaves change to shades of orange and red. It prefers moist, acidic soil and grows in part shade to full sun. Remove root suckers to prevent spreading.

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.

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 without resistance to this disease. Information about disease-resistant cultivars studied at the University of Kentucky is available in "The Flowering Crabapple" publication at the website <https://publications.mgcafe.uky.edu/files/id68.pdf> or from your county Cooperative Extension Service office.

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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 and female flowers are produced on different plants so the holly depends on pollinators. 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 and fragrant. The bottom flowers begin to open first and continue to the tip of the stem, resulting in a long blooming period. The height of the shrub ranges from 3 to 8 feet tall and spreads 4 to 6 feet wide, depending on the growing conditions. Clethra prefers moist to wet soil and thrives in partial shade to full sun.

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:

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“Woody Ornamentals for Bee-Friendly Landscapes (Ohio Valley Region)” is a list of other trees and shrubs that are bee-friendly. It is available at https://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=entomology_reports 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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