

Island Flowers: Planting for Pollinators

by Pat McGovern for Bee Friendly Gardeners

When one thinks of “Island Flowers”, the first thought might be something exotic... Orchids? Hibiscus? Birds of Paradise? But as we planned our flowers for a traffic island in downtown Lebanon, NH, we were not thinking “exotic” - we were thinking “pesticide-free.”

Interested in Lebanon’s “Beautification” initiative, a small group of Lebanon gardeners coalesced around the idea of planting flowers that would not only create beauty but would support local pollinators. We named ourselves “Bee Friendly Gardeners.” (For safety reasons, we were required to wear neon vests while working on the island... perhaps “Yellow Jackets” would have been more appropriate?)



Bee Friendly Worker Bees: Susan Johnson, Barbara Slaiby, and Kathy Elfstrom

The City had prepared the site the previous year - they left a grassy border which was maintained by the Public Works Dept. They also installed irrigation on a timer. (I forgot one day while weeding and got completely soaked . . . it was a hot day so it was actually a relief - I laughed and kept on weeding!)

It is easy to find organic flower seeds in Lebanon; we planted organic Nasturtium, Zinnia, Garlic Chive, and Marigold seeds. It is not easy to find pesticide-free flowering plants locally. (The closest pesticide-free plants came from Bagley Pond Perennials in Warner, N.H. a 1 ½ hour round trip.) Fortunately, we had perennial pollinator flowers to contribute from our own pesticide-free gardens: Lupine, Bee Balm, Purple Coneflowers, Black and Brown-eyed Susans, Milkweed, Lobelia, Goldenrod, Coral Bells, Daylilies, Coreopsis, Turtlehead, Bachelor Buttons, and many more.

Our goal was to have at least three varieties of native pollinator flowers for Early, Mid, and Late season blooming. This is what we planted:

Early (May-June) Golden Alexander, Canada Columbine, Foxglove Beardtongue.

Mid (June-August) Scarlet Bee Balm, Wild Bergamot, Common Milkweed, Blazing Star Liatris, Great Blue Lobelia.

Late (August-October) Goldenrod, Garlic Chives, Turtlehead, Butterfly Milkweed.

The bee balm and the goldenrod were the top choices among pollinators, closely followed by the pink turtlehead (which only bumble bees could access.) It was interesting to see how many different pollinators and other insects gathered on the goldenrod after most other flowers had gone by. It was a peaceable kingdom with so many different bees, beetles, moths, flies, wasps, and butterflies gathered there, all feasting on the pollen and nectar.

Using the iNaturalist App to Document Pollinator Sightings

The [Vermont Center for EcoStudies](#) included Lebanon in their [Pollinator Research Program](#) this summer. With the help of the iNaturalist citizen science app, we documented Common, Tri-colored, and Two-Spotted Bumble Bees; Northern Crescent, Pearl Crescent and Cabbage Butterflies; Western Honey Bees, Yellow Collared Scape Moths, Transverse Banded Flower Flies, Margined Calligrapher Flies, and a variety of beautiful Paper and Potter Wasps. And, eureka, a monarch chrysalis! The diversity of pollinator life on this traffic island was impressive!

To see some of the diverse pollinator life of our downtown traffic island garden, see photos in our [Google Drive folder](#). Below: a Dark Paper Wasp and Tricolored Bumblebee on Goldenrod.



