Powerful pollinators

Encouraging insect pollinators in farm landscapes

Pollinators are an essential component of agricultural production and of healthy, biodiverse landscapes. Protecting and enhancing pollinator resources on farms will help support a diverse range of pollinators. This brochure provides an introduction to encouraging insect pollinators on farms, including a guide to choosing plants that will support diverse pollinators throughout the year.

WHEEN BEE FOUNDATION

The power of pollinators

Pollinators – mostly insects, but also birds and mammals – assist the production of seeds and fruit in many plant species by visiting flowers in search of food (nectar and/or pollen). Whilst foraging they transfer pollen from one flower to another, facilitating fertilisation, which results in fruits and seeds.

Honey bees, native bees and other native insects like hoverflies, wasps and butterflies provide essential pollination services for native plants, garden flowers, fruits and vegetables.

Native vegetation supports pollinators by providing food and nesting sites. Nearby crops and pastures will benefit from the increased abundance and diversity of pollinators in the landscape.

Pollinators and food security

Without insect pollinators, the quantity and diversity of food and plants grown in backyard gardens would be severely restricted. Many of the foods we eat, from gardens and farms, benefit from pollination.

Pollinator-dependent foods include citrus, apples, stone-fruits, zucchini, pumpkins, strawberries and tomatoes, as well as plants grown for seed such as sunflowers, coriander and parsley.

The quantity and diversity of insect pollinators are key drivers of production as they influence both food yields and quality. Under-pollination results in smaller and misshapen fruit or seed that isn't viable.

A diverse and healthy community of pollinators generally provides more effective and consistent pollination than relying on any single species.

Pollinators are essential to, and dependent upon, healthy ecosystems. A growing human population and increasing demand for food puts pressure on ecosystems, with potential negative impacts on biodiversity, the environment and food production.

Insect populations are in decline worldwide due to land clearing, intensive or monocultural agriculture, pesticide use, pollution, colony disease, increased urbanisation and climate change. Low pollinator numbers mean not all flowers are pollinated, leading to low fruit or seed set. This in turn reduces fruit and vegetable harvest yields, and decreases food supply.

Under-pollination results in smaller, misshapen fruit such as this strawberry.

Backyard biodiversity

Insect pollinators are a prime example of the importance of healthy ecosystems in urban gardens, parks and reserves. Insects are the 'canaries in the coal mine' of our urban and rural environments. Without our 'littlest creatures', we lack pollinators, natural beneficial pest control services, and critical food source for other insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals.

The presence of connected and widespread pollinator habitat is critical to support insect populations if we are to maintain sustainable cities and productive, healthy gardens and urban farms for food security and biodiversity.

Pollinators require habitat that contains year-round food sources, breeding resources and nesting sites. The presence of pollinator habitat adjacent to food crops has been shown to improve food production by enabling a greater variety and number of pollinators to persist year-round, providing pollination services when required.

Turn to the centre of this brochure for a guide to planting for pollinators.

Diapause or diet? Where are the insects?

Many insect pollinators undergo a diapause during colder winter months. Diapause is a period of suspended development during unfavourable environmental conditions, and during this period insect pollinators do not need flowers. Birds and other small mammals will continue to benefit from available pollen and nectar during this time.

If there are low numbers of insect pollinators in your local area, it is important to determine whether this is because of diapause, or because of an inadequate availability of nectar and pollen creating a 'food desert' where insect pollinators cannot survive.

There are still many unknowns about insect pollinators in Australia. Take part in Australian Pollinator Week or in the annual Australian Pollinator Count to learn more about pollinators in your area – visit: **AustralianPollinatorWeek.org.au** and **AustralianPollinatorCount.au**

Encouraging pollinators in your garden

Create pollination reservoirs

Pollination reservoirs are areas that provide floral resources for pollinators. They can be gardens, new plantings or existing habitat such as established trees, or even local bushland, parks or reserves. A high diversity of plant species is essential to provide nectar, pollen and nesting sites throughout the year. Pollination reservoirs need to be close enough to where pollinators live to ensure that they can fly easily to them.

Improve on what you have

Enhance and improve your existing pollinator habitat where possible. Gardens that already contain established trees, rockeries, ponds, bare soil and organic matter, and a variety of flowering plants, are a valuable resource for beneficial insects and pollinators.

Nature-strips, verges, laneways, vegetable gardens, orchards, nature reserves, and riverbanks and creeks can all be important pollinator-attracting areas. Protect and enhance native pollinator plants in your garden and surrounds for the future.

Plant trees, shrubs and groundcovers

Planting a variety of species of groundcovers, shrubs and trees in your garden will further attract pollinators to your patch. Initial watering and protection will improve the success rate of young plants. Some plants such as wildflowers or native pea species are excellent at attracting pollinators, rewarding keen gardeners with a diversity of native pollinators.

Be a citizen scientist and do some detective work to discover local pollinators in your patch. Visit **inaturalist.ala.org.au** to be involved.

Construct insect real estate

Insect hotels, which are both functional and attractive, are a great way to add to habitat and nesting places for pollinators and insects in your backyard or garden. The hotels are easily moved to be close to flowering plants and those needing pollination, especially if you have a new garden that is still growing. Include lots of different sized holes, cracks and crevices to provide homes for various solitary insect pollinators.

Plant for the future

When establishing pollinator habitat, consider including species that are indigenous to your area but can tolerate increasingly drier and warmer conditions, to create resilient habitat for climate change. Rehabilitate weedy areas into managed pollination reservoirs by introducing lots of flowering plant diversity. Be careful not to plant invasive or listed weeds, and look for suitable replacements.

Amplify the flower signal

Plants have evolved large flowers or clusters of smaller flowers because they attract more pollinator visits. Large, colourful and diverse plantings attract more pollinators. Ideally, plant in groups that contain different vegetation layers — combine a species-rich mixture of wildflowers, ground-covers, herbs, lilies, rushes, climbers, shrubs and trees.

Connectivity counts

Insect pollinators benefit from greater connectivity of habitat in a landscape, which allows them to forage over a wider radius and increase in numbers in a local area. Encourage friends and neighbours to plant for pollinators and create connections in your community.

Get to know your local flora

Your local government area has distinct populations of insects, depending on the local flora and environment. Knowing your local insect species will help you develop better plantings.

The plants growing in nearby nature reserves or bushland will be suited to your climate and soils. Local environment groups and specialist native nurseries can provide information about local plants.

Grow a bumper crop

Pollinator-attracting plants include many fruits and vegetables grown in backyards, community and market gardens, and orchards. Pollinators ensure good yields of crops such as apples, beans, avocado, and almonds, and bush foods such as Lilly-Pilly and Finger Limes.

Reduce chemical use

Insecticides, fungicides and herbicides all affect bee, colony and wild pollinator health. Herbicides can impact pollinators by reducing the availability and diversity of flora and removing vegetation that helps support insect life. Some herbicides can also harm the beneficial microbes in the insect gut. Insecticides are an obvious threat to pollinators, yet many beneficial insects will, in healthy numbers, help control pest insects, ultimately reducing the need for insecticide use.

Many crops are dependent on pollination by bees. When chemical pest control is unavoidable, select products that are least harmful for pollinators and apply insecticides in the evening or at night when pollinators are not active. Always use according to directions, especially for withholding periods, and notify beekeepers a few days before spraying chemicals so beehives can be safely relocated away from harm.

Safeguard the bees? The best way to 'save the bees' and protect our pollinators is to create an abundance of diverse habitat — from the ground up! There is much interest in keeping a bee hive to promote pollinators, but there are serious legal and biosecurity responsibilities that must be considered, and that the introduction of a bee hive does not displace existing native pollinators and insects. Be a friend of pollinators and say it with flowers!

A guide to planting for pollinators for the Western District, Victoria

Healthy populations of insect pollinators are important for sustainable and resilient farms, orchards, gardens, and native flora.

This Guide will help you select plant species to attract and sustain pollinators in agricultural areas and gardens throughout the year.

The Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion is characterised by basaltic flows, heavy cracking soils, lighter clay loams. Dotted with craters, cones, and lakes, the vegetation is heavily cleared for farming, with <1% native grasslands remaining. Grassy woodlands, riparian scrub predominate in wetter areas.

All the plants listed have been selected for their resilience and capacity to supply rewards to pollinators. There is an emphasis on species that can withstand dry periods and irregular rainfall but some of the forbs, especially the lilies, will require moist habitats.

The eucalypt species in the chart have been selected as high quality honey production species. Most eucalypt species do not flower every year, so choosing diverse species will help create continuously flowering habitat.

How to use the calendar

To create pollinator-attracting plantings, use the guide to choose a selection of plants with a variety of floral colours, growth habits and flowering seasons.

For each species, the planting guide lists:

- plant growth habit (forb, shrub or tree) and height
- the habitat in which they naturally occur
- flower colour and flowering season
- the plant's growth requirements (sun or shade, moist or dry)
- the insect groups that use each plant and the type of reward the pollinator receives (pollen and/or nectar).

The coloured bars show the flowering months for each species. Heavier shading indicates peak flowering period. Because flowering dates will differ between regions and seasons, non-peak flowering months are shown in a paler tone. Take particular note of these non-peak times if your region is consistently warmer or cooler than average and experiences early or late flowering times.

Sourcing plants

Most of the plant species listed are easy to establish from tubestock or seeds and all are available from retail or wholesale nurseries. If you can't source these plants at your local nursery, ask them to contact the local wholesale nursery suppliers and plant growers listed online – see the reverse of this guide for details.

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WheenBeeFoundation.org.au

Lifeform	Common name	Scientific name	Family	Vegetation type	Height	Flower colour	Flowering												Aspect	Soil moisture	Pollinator reward		Visitation by pollinator							
							Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec			Pollen	Nectar	Native bees	Honey bees	Hoverflies	Wasps	Butterflies	Moths	Beetles	Flies
Crop plants																														
Forb	Clover	*Trifolium repens*	Fabaceae	Pasture / fodder	0.3 m	White													Sun		●	●	●	●			●			
Herb	Onion	*Allium cepa*	Amaryllidaceae	Horticulture	1 m	White													Sun		●	●	●	●	●		●			●
Herb	Canola	*Brassica napus*	Brassicaceae	Broadacre cropping	1.5 m	Yellow													Sun		●	●	●	●	●		●			●
Herb	Buckwheat	*Fagopyrum esculentum*	Polygonaceae	Broadacre cropping	2 m	White													Sun		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Herb	Sunflower	*Helianthus annuus*	Asteraceae	Broadacre cropping	2 m	Yellow													Sun		●	●	●	●						
Herb	Flaxseed	*Linum usitatissimum*	Linaceae	Broadacre cropping	1 m	Blue													Sun		●	●	●	●			●			
Herb	Lucerne	*Medicago sativa*	Fabaceae	Broadacre cropping	0.75 m	Purple													Sun		●	●	●	●			●		●	●
Herb	Faba Beans	*Vicia faba*	Fabaceae	Broadacre cropping	1 m	White & Brown													Sun		●	●	●	●		●			●	
Shrub to Small Tree	Tree Lucerne (Tagasaste)	*Chamaecytisus palmensis*	Fabaceae	Fodder / shelter	5 m	Cream													Sun to semi-shade		●	●	●	●						
Tree	Sugar Gum	*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*	Myrtaceae	Plantation / forestry	< 30 m	White													Sun		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Tree	Blue Gum	*Eucalyptus globulus*	Myrtaceae	Plantation / forestry	15–50 m	White													Sun to semi-shade		●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Tree	Radiata Pine	*Pinus radiata*	Pinaceae	Plantation / forestry	15–30 m	Pale Yellow													Sun to semi-shade		●			●						
Native plants																														
Climber	Purple Coral-Pea	*Hardenbergia violacea*	Fabaceae	Woodland, Heathland, Forest	< 2 m	Purple													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●			●		
Climber	Mountain Clematis	*Clematis aristata*	Ranunculaceae	Woodland, Shrubland	2–4 m	Cream													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●			
Climber	Small-Leafed Clematis	*Clematis microphylla*	Ranunculaceae	Woodland, Shrubland	2–4 m	Cream													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●			
Forb	Chocolate Lily	*Arthropodium strictum*	Asparagaceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland	0.3 m	Pink-mauve													Sun	Moist to dry	●*	●	●							
Forb	Black Anther Flax Lily	*Dianella revoluta*	Asphodelaceae	Woodland, Heathland	1 m	Indigo													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●*		●							
Forb	Tasman Flax Lily	*Dianella tasmanica*	Asphodelaceae	Woodland, Forest	1 m	Indigo													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●*		●							
Forb	Common Everlasting	*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*	Asteraceae	Grassland, Woodland, Heathland	0.3 m	Yellow													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Forb	Yam Daisy, Murnong	*Microseris lanceolata*	Asteraceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland	0.3 m	Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Forb	Tall Bluebell	*Wahlenbergia stricta*	Campanulaceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland	0.3 m	Blue													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●						●	
Forb	Native Bindweed	*Convolvulus angustissimus*	Convolvulaceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland	0.2 m	Pink													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●					
Forb	Native Pelargonium	*Pelargonium australe*	Geraniaceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland, Shrubland	0.5 m	Pink-mauve													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●			●	●		●	●
Forb	Blue Pincushion	*Brunonia australis*	Goodeniaceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland	0.3 m	Blue													Sun	Dry	●	●								
Forb	Bulbine Lily	*Bulbine bulbosa*	Asphodelaceae	Grassland	0.3 m	Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●
Forb	Sheep's Burr; Bidgee Widgee	*Acaena novae-zelandiae*	Rosaceae	Grassland, Woodland	0.3 m	Cream													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry		●	●	●						
Forb	Grass Trigger Plant	*Stylidium graminifolium*	Stylidiaceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland, Forest	0.3 m	Pink													Sun to part shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●					●
Sedge	Spiny-Headed Mat Rush	*Lomandra longifolia*	Asparagaceae	Woodland, Heathland, Wetland	100 cm	White-cream													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
Sedge	Tall Sedge	*Carex appressa*	Cyperaceae	Woodland, Wetland	1–2 m	Yellow-brown													Sun	Moist to wet		●	●			●	●			
Sedge	Saw Sedge	*Gahnia sieberiana*	Cyperaceae	Wetland	1–2.5 m	Brown													Sun	Wet to moist	●	●	●			●	●			
Shrub	Creeping Boobialla	*Myoporum parvifolium*	Scrophulariaceae	Woodland, Shrubland	0.3 m	White													Sun	Dry	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub	Blue Devil	*Eryngium ovinum*	Apiaceae	Grassland, Herbfield	0.5 m	Blue													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub	Grass Tree	*Xanthorrhoea australis*	Asphodelaceae	Grassland, Woodland	2 m	Cream													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●	●	●	●			●		●	
Shrub	Button Everlasting	*Coronidium scorpiodes*	Asteraceae	Grassland, Herbfield, Woodland	0.3 m	Yellow													sun	Dry	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
Shrub	Native Dogwood	*Cassinia aculeata*	Asteraceae	Woodland, Forest, Heathland	< 3 m	White-pink													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
Shrub	Variable Groundsel	*Senecio pinnatifolius*	Asteraceae	Woodland, Shrubland, Wetland	0.5 m	Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●			●
Shrub	Hop Bitter Pea	*Daviesia latifolia*	Fabaceae	Woodland, Heathland	1–5 m	Red & Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●	●	●	●	●					
Shrub	Gorse Bitter Pea	*Daviesia ulicifolia*	Fabaceae	Woodland, Forest, Heathland	< 2 m	Red & Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●	●	●	●	●					
Shrub	Hop Goodenia	*Goodenia ovata*	Goodeniaceae	Woodland, Forest	2 m	Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Moist		●	●	●	●					
Shrub	Native Hemp Bush	*Gynatrix pulchella*	Malvaceae	Woodland, Forest	4 m	Green-white													Semi-shade	Moist	●	●	●				●		●	
Shrub	Fringe Myrtle	*Calytrix tetragona*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Heathland	1 m	White-pink													Sun	Dry	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Shrub	Native Bramble	*Rubus parvifolius*	Rosaceae	Woodland, Forest	1 m	White													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Shrub	White Correa	*Correa alba*	Rutaceae	Woodland, Forest, Heathland	2 m	White													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●			●			
Shrub	Native Fuchsia	*Correa reflexa*	Rutaceae	Woodland, Heathland	0.5–3 m	Pink-red													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●			●			
Shrub	Hop Bush	*Dodonaea viscosa*	Sapindaceae	Woodland, Forest	3–4 m	Pink													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●	●	●	●	●					
Shrub	Common Rice Flower	*Pimelea humilis*	Thymelaeaceae	Woodland, Forest	0.3 m	White-cream													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●			
Shrub	Tree Violet	*Melicytus dentatus*	Violaceae	Woodland, Shrubland	2–5 m	Pale Yellow													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Tree Everlasting	*Ozothamnus ferrugineus*	Asteraceae	Woodland, Shrubland	2–5 m	White													Sun	Dry	●	●	●				●			●
Shrub to Small Tree	Prickly Moses	*Acacia verticillata*	Fabaceae	Woodland	3 m	Yellow													Sun	Moist to dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Christmas Bush	*Prostanthera lasianthos*	Lamiaceae	Woodland, Forest,	1–5 m	White-pale mauve													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●				●			
Shrub to Small Tree	River Bottlebrush	*Callistemon sieberi*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Riparian	4 m	Pink													Sun to semi-shade	Wet to moist	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Prickly Tea Tree	*Leptospermum continentale*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Heathland, Forest	3 m	White													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Woolly Tea Tree	*Leptospermum lanigerum*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Heathland, Forest	4 m	White													Sun to semi-shade	Wet to moist	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Manuka	*Leptospermum scoparium*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest, Heathland	4 m	White-pink													Sun to semi-shade	Wet to moist	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Moonah	*Melaleuca lanceolata*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Heathland	10 m	White-cream													Sun	Wet to moist	●	●	●	●			●	●		●
Shrub to Small Tree	Scented Paperbark	*Melaleuca squarrosa*	Myrtaceae	Forest, Wetland	10 m	White-cream													Sun	Wet to moist	●	●	●	●			●	●		●
Shrub to Small Tree	Kurwan; Sweet Bursaria; Blackthorn	*Bursaria spinosa*	Pittosporaceae	Woodland, Shrubland	4–6 m	White													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Silver Banksia	*Banksia marginata*	Proteaceae	Grassland, Woodland	5–11 m	Yellow													Sun	Wet to moist	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Silky Hakea	*Hakea sericea*	Proteaceae	Woodland, Heathland	0.5–4.5 m	White-cream													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Shrub to Small Tree	Kangaroo Apple, Poroporo	*Solanum aviculare*	Solanaceae	Woodland, Shrubland, Forest	2–3 m	Purple													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●*		●							
Tree	Drooping Sheoak	*Allocasuarina verticillata*	Casuarinaceae	Grassland, Woodland	5–11 m	Red & Yellow													Sun	Dry	●		●		●					
Tree	Silver Wattle	*Acacia dealbata*	Fabaceae	Woodland	3 m–30 m	Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Lightwood	*Acacia implexa*	Fabaceae	Woodland	8–10 m	Cream-yellow													Sun	Dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Black Wattle	*Acacia mearnsii*	Fabaceae	Woodland, Forest	10 m	Pale Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Moist to dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Blackwood	*Acacia melanoxylon*	Fabaceae	Woodland, Forest	8–20 m	Pale Yellow													Sun to semi-shade	Dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Golden Wattle	*Acacia pycnantha*	Fabaceae	Woodland	5 m	Yellow													Full sun	Moist to dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Brown Stringybark	*Eucalyptus baxteri*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	< 40 m	Cream													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	River Red Gum	*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*	Myrtaceae	Grassland, Woodland	20 m	Cream													Sun	Moist to dry	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Yellow Gum	*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	< 25 m	Cream-pink													Sun	Moist to dry			●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Red Stringybark	*Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	< 35 m	White													Sun	Dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Yellow Box	*Eucalyptus melliodora*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	15 m	White													Sun	Moist to dry			●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Grey Box	*Eucalyptus microcarpa*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	< 25 m	White													Sun	Moist to dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Messmate Stringybark	*Eucalyptus obliqua*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	< 90 m	White													Sun	Moist to dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Swamp Gum	*Eucalyptus ovata*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	15 m	White													Sun	Wet to moist	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Red Box	*Eucalyptus polyanthemos*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	20–40 m	White													Sun	Dry			●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Narrow-Leaf Peppermint	*Eucalyptus radiata*	Myrtaceae	Forest	< 40 m	White													Sun	Moist	●		●	●			●	●	●	●
Tree	Manna Gum	*Eucalyptus viminalis*	Myrtaceae	Woodland, Forest	25 m	White													Sun	Moist to dry	●		●	●			●	●	●	●

*Buzz Pollinated

Know your pollinators

European honey bee
(Apis mellifera) © iStock

European honey bees have two pairs of wings and long, segmented antennae. They are daytime-flying and feed on nectar and pollen. They are generalist pollinators and provide the bulk of pollination services for horticulture and crop plants. Honey bees and native bees are both essential to functioning ecosystems and food security in Australia.

Honey bees have become an important part of the Australian landscape. Honey bees live as colonies, and have a long history of coexistence with humans, including in domestic gardens.

Leafcutter bee
(Megachile maculariformis) © Karen Retra

Australian native bees comprise more than 2000 species, which provide essential pollination services. Native bees are generally solitary and live in nests in the ground or in hollow stems, old borer holes and other cracks and crevices, and some have evolved to pollinate particular native flowers through 'buzz pollination'. Although many Australian native bees are generalist foragers, some species have co-evolved with native plants and adapted to be the most effective pollinators of their flowers. Many native plant species, such as *Dianella* and *Grevillea* require specially adapted insects to access their nectar and enable the transfer of pollen to the stigma. Most native bees are solitary, but some species found in northern Australia (*Tetragonula* sp. and *Austroplebeia* sp.) are social bees and are used for commercial pollination of crops like macadamia nuts.

Bee fly
(Family *Bombyliidae*) © Karen Retra

Fly species number up to 30,000 in Australia, and can be identified by having only one pair of flight wings. A second set of wings are modified into club-shaped paddles that allow flies to hover and stabilise their flight. Unlike bees and wasps, many flies (Brachycera) have very small, clubbed antennae at the front of their head. Flies, including blowflies, are often attracted to flowers that smell like carrion. Some flower-flies, have hairy bodies that easily collect pollen while they are feeding. Flies provide a range of services in the garden, including pollination, decomposition and predation.

Hoverfly
(Family *Syrphidae*) © Karen Retra

Hoverflies are a type of fly, distinguishable by their large eyes, short antennae, bright black and yellow abdomen and their hovering flight behaviour. Adult hoverflies are nectar and pollen feeders. Hoverfly larvae feed on pests such as aphids, thrips and leafhoppers and are excellent biocontrol agents.

Fiddler Beetle
(Eupoecila australasiae) © Erica Siegel

Beetles have hard outer wings that form their distinctive beetle shape. Their outer wings form a T-shape where they join at the top, unlike bugs where the outer wings make an X- or Y-shape. Some beetles feed on nectar and pollen, usually by crawling over flower surfaces. There are around 30,000 species of beetles in Australia, with many yet to be formally described.

Meadow argus
(Junonia villida) © J. Hort

Butterflies have wings covered in tiny scales. They have clubbed antennae and hold their wings upright when at rest. They are day-flying and have long tongues that they can use to feed on nectar in flowers with deep tubes. Butterflies are usually brightly coloured, with approximately 600 species found in Australia.

Beautiful leaf moth
(Gastrophora henricaria) © Karen Retra

Moths also have wings covered in tiny scales and tend to be subtle in colour. They have antennae without clubs and hold their wings flat when at rest. They are generally dusk- and night-flying but there are some exceptions: the grapevine moth is a commonly seen day-flying moth. Moths feed on nectar. Australia has a high diversity of moth species, with up to 22,000 species thought to exist across the continent.

Flower forms

© Meredith Cosgrove

Generalist flowers can be pollinated by many different insects and animals. They are typically saucer shaped with many stamens and have a surface that insects can walk on. *Eucalyptus* flowers and daisy flowers are generalist flowers — they can be pollinated by bees, flies, beetles and butterflies.

© Meredith Cosgrove

Specialist flowers have modifications to their shape and size that only let certain pollinators access the nectar and pollen. These flowers might have deep flower tubes or narrow entry points so that only a select group of pollinators can access them. The advantage of specialisation is that pollination is very targeted and efficient, with accurate pollen placement made possible by co-evolution between flowers and insects. The disadvantage is that if the correct pollinator isn't there, the flowers aren't pollinated. Often, nectar is produced at the base of the flower, forcing pollinators to enter the flower fully and in the process, become covered in pollen.

Pollinator rewards

Nectar is a sugary solution, rich in carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, produced by flowers and sometimes by glands on leaves or stems (called extra-floral nectaries). Nectar is attractive to insects, and provides an immediate energy source needed for tasks such as hunting pest insects, laying eggs in decomposing organic matter, collecting pollen, or parasitising other insects.

Carbohydrates alone don't support everything needed for health and growth, so insects also need pollen.

Pollen is rich in protein, fats and nutrients. Bees are vegetarian, and need to collect pollen to feed their offspring.

Buzz pollination

Some flowers do not produce any nectar; they specifically target pollen-collecting bees, and only offer pollen rewards. To limit pollen loss and ensure effective pollination, some plants produce flowers with specialised, tubular anthers, that only open at the tip. To extract pollen, bees use vibrations to 'buzz' the pollen grains out of the pores of these anthers. Many crops are buzz pollinated, including tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants, capsicum, chillies, tomatillo and cranberries.

European honey bees are unable to buzz pollinate flowers, but several native bees, such as the blue-banded bee, and teddy bear bee (*Amegilla* sp.) and carpenter bee (*Xylocopa* sp.) are exceptionally good large buzz pollinators, and have evolved to pollinate native plants such as flax lilies (*Dianella* sp.). Many of our smaller, ground nesting bees utilise vibration to help them excavate their burrows, and they also use that skill to buzz pollen from the anthers of native plants.

Planting buzz-pollinated species will encourage populations of buzz pollinators for successful pollination of food crops and ensure seed set in native plants. Many small ground nesting bees also buzz pollinate native flowers.

Nectar feeding

Grevillea flowers and other tubular flowers are often adapted to be successfully pollinated by birds. Pollen is 'presented' on a floral stigma that extends outside the flower. When birds feed on the nectar, pollen is deposited on their beaks or heads. Bees, also attracted to the sugary nectar, crawl into the side of the flower and feed on the nectar without encountering the pollen-laden stigma. The plant doesn't receive the pollination benefit from the insect, but flowers such Grevillea species can be a very useful source of nectar for insects in the cooler months.

Nurseries

Most of the plants shown in the planting guide will be available at nurseries that have a good stock of native plants. But if your local nursery doesn't stock the plant you're after, ask them to order it in. For a list of wholesale nurseries that stock all the plants shown in the planting guide, plus other useful resources, visit the Wheen Bee Foundation website or scan the QR code.

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Wheen Bee Foundation

Powerful Pollinators Planting Guides are produced by Wheen Bee Foundation. We fund vital strategic research and education initiatives that strengthen bees, improve pollination efficiency, and protect our food security and ecosystem health. Visit the website for more information.

WheenBeeFoundation.org.au

Far left: The spreading flax lily, *Dianella revoluta*, is buzz pollinated.

Left: This European honey bee is 'side-working': feeding on the nectar-rich flowers without coming into contact with the plant's pollen.

Front cover:
1. Australian native reed bee, *Exoneura* species. (Photo: John Tann)
2. Red Rock, Victoria. (Photo: Bob T.)
3. European honey bees, *Apis mellifera*. (Photo: Kirrily Hughes)

This project is supported by: Smart Farms, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, and our project partners Burt's Bees and Sustainable Farms.

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