

Choose Native Plants

Like butterflies? Enjoy birds? Garden with Vermont plants.

Native plants can help turn your yard into a wonderful **wildlife** preserve. They provide **butterflies, birds** and **bees** the **habitat** and **food** they need to survive and reproduce, in turn supporting other forms of wildlife that get energy directly from plants or by eating something that has already eaten a plant.

When land is converted to **lawn** or planted with **non-native plants** imported from **Europe** or **Asia**, native insects have a hard time finding something to eat because they are adapted to use particular plant species for food, lay **eggs** and hide from **predators**. Insect **diversity** and populations drop significantly when native plant species disappear – gardens with native plants have three times as many insect species and 35 times as much insect biomass as those with non-natives. Smaller populations means insects are not fulfilling the critical role they play in an ecosystem's **food web**.

Here are a few things you can do to create a wildlife and insect haven in your yard:

- Plant native perennials, shrubs, and trees. They offer birds the best variety and most abundant source of seasonal **seeds, fruits** and insects. Check out the Resource hub for “Native Perennials and Shrubs for Vermont Gardens”, a list of native **Vermont** plants and the insects they support.
- Replace lawns with **woodlands, meadows**, native gardens and shrubs. Reduce the need for labor-intensive, gas-consuming lawn care by planting low-maintenance, native vegetation. Check out the Resource hub for “Alternatives to common invasives”.
- Provide **pollinators** a range of species that bloom throughout the season. Perennial beds do not include the seasonal variety that bees and other pollinators need. Include late-blooming native **asters, goldenrods** and **sunflowers** in your borders and meadows.
- Whenever possible, leave **leaf litter** alone. Many insects **overwinter** in leaf litter, so leaving it on the ground allows many species of **moths** and butterflies to make it through Vermont’s long winters. For example, leaf litter frequently contains moth eggs, so those moths cannot survive if leaf litter is bagged and sent to the landfill.
- Maintain naturally “messy” areas - leave **woody debris** alone. Many bees live alone or in colonies in twigs, stumps, dead branches or wood, and some birds nest on the ground and forage in leaf litter for insects.

