

Plants for Pollinators at the PMC



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Photo by James Cane, ARS, Logan, Utah

Honey bee on firecracker penstemon

Plants for Pollinators

Many agricultural crops benefit from insect pollination, mostly provided by bees. In North America, bees pollinate about \$14 billion worth of crops annually. Up to one quarter of our diet comes from crops whose production benefits from pollinating bees.

Pollinators include bees, moths, flies, beetles, wasps, desert bats, hummingbirds and butterflies. These pollinators are critical to the function of our ecosystem because they allow plants to reproduce. Plants provide food and cover for wildlife, help stabilize the soil and serve as buffers to improve water quality. Currently, many pollinators are threatened by habitat loss, disease, parasites and improper use of pesticides.

The Aberdeen PMC tests and selects plants to help solve resource problems. This fact sheet describes the pollinator friendly plant species under production or evaluation at the PMC.



Flax, Lewis and Blue

Lewis flax is a native, perennial semi-evergreen light-blue to white flowered forb that prefers well-drained soils and open light and grows well in 10-18 inch precipitation zones. The PMC grows seed of Maple Grove Selected Class Germplasm.

Blue flax is an introduced perennial semi-evergreen dark blue flowered forb that prefers similar conditions as Lewis flax. The PMC grows seed of the cultivar 'Appar'.

Flax blooms from May to July and attracts some species of bees and flower flies. Songbirds relish the seeds, and the plants are eaten readily by large animals.

Small Burnet

Small burnet is a perennial semi-evergreen introduced forb that is deep-rooted and has good palatability for livestock and wildlife. It prefers well-drained soils in 14-26 inch precipitation zones. Flowers are not very showy but readily attract some bees. The leaves can be used in salads and as a tea. It blooms from June to August. The PMC grows seed of the cultivar 'Delar'.



Firecracker Penstemon



Firecracker penstemon is a relatively short-lived perennial, native forb with bright red, showy flowers that blooms from April to June. It prefers well-drained soils in 10-16 inch precipitation zones with full sunlight. It attracts hummingbirds and sometimes honey bees and native bees. The PMC grows seed of the Richfield Selection Germplasm.

Venus Penstemon

Venus penstemon is a perennial, long-lived native forb with bright lavender to purple flowers that blooms from April to June. It has a strong taproot and woody base. It prefers well-drained soils in 20-35 inch precipitation zones with full sunlight. It attracts native specialist bees and bumble bees, and non-aggressive specialist pollen wasps. The PMC grows seed of the Clearwater Selection Germplasm.



Plants Under Evaluation

The PMC is currently evaluating accessions of sulphur-flower and whorled buckwheat, Douglas' dustymaiden, hoary tansyaster, fernleaf biscuitroot, Grays biscuitroot, nineleaf biscuitroot and Searls' prairieclover. These native forbs attract diverse pollinators, especially native bees. One of the major reasons the PMC is evaluating these native forbs is that these plants attract other insects that are a very important part of the sage-grouse diet. Sage-grouse populations are threatened, and one way to help increase sage-grouse populations is to restore native plants that attract insects in sage-grouse habitat.



Whorled buckwheat



Hoary tansyaster



Douglas' dustymaiden