

Nectar Plants for South Carolina Lowcountry Gardens

Finding successful nectar plants is a matter of trial and error. A species a mile away being visited by pollinators may not attract anything at your house. Microclimate, mass and color of the planting, and nearby habitats all have an influence. Names in bold lettering are plants that are often successful. An array of native plants blooming over several seasons as well as tried and true, non-invasive exotics will encourage other native pollinators as well as butterflies. Please check on the preferred growing conditions for these plants before buying and planting.

Exotic Nectar Plants	Notes
<i>Lantana camara</i> seems to be more attractive than the recumbent <i>L. montevidensis</i>	Purchase sterile varieties to stem the spread of feral lantana. These include the large, popular ‘Miss Huff’ and ‘Gold Mound’.
Butterfly Bush (<i>Buddleja davidii</i>)	Ditto—fertile varieties can produce a lot of seeds and unwanted, invasive seedlings.
Chinese Abelia (<i>Abelia chinensis</i>) or Glossy Abelia (<i>A. grandiflora</i>)	
Chaste Tree (<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i>)	
Mexican Milkweed (<i>Asclepias curassavica</i>)	Nectar and host plant
Flowering chives, garlic, onions (<i>Allium</i> spp.)	
<i>Zinnia elegans</i> and <i>angustifolia</i>	Buy the old-fashioned, open-faced zinnia varieties—easier for insects to access the florets.
Marigolds (<i>Tagetes</i> spp.)	Ditto
Mexican Sunflower (<i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i>)	“Torch” is a recommended variety
Sage (<i>Salvia</i> spp.)	There are good exotic and native species. Pineapple sage, <i>Salvia elegans</i> , is a fall
<i>Cuphea</i> spp. Including Mexican heather	‘Candy Corn’ and Mexican heather are 2 often sold. The ones with long tubular flowers are better for hummingbirds than butterflies.
Porterweed (<i>Stachytarpheta</i> spp.)	Medium to tall plants good for swallowtails and hummingbirds.
Cardinal Climber (<i>Ipomoea x multifida</i>) and Cypress Vine (<i>Ipomoea quamoclit</i>)	Both feathery vines can be high climbers. They are annuals, but often reseed. Good nectar plants when others are dying of heat. Readily reseed themselves.
<i>Vervain (Verbena bonariensis</i> and <i>brasiliensis</i>)	These 2 are naturalized from tropical South America and are great for skippers. They can get out of hand. <i>Bonariensis</i> has denser flower heads.

Queen Anne's Lace, Dill, others in carrot family	The umbel flower heads of Queen Anne's Lace are used for nectar by some hairstreaks. Queen Anne's Lace can be a weedy invader.
Mexican milkweed (<i>Asclepias currasivica</i>)	
Annual Vinca (<i>Cartharanthus spp.</i>)	A long lasting annual (sometimes into the winter) used by all size butterflies. Don't get the invasive, perennial, vining vinca.
Native Nectar Plants	Notes
Crabapple (<i>Malus angustifolia</i>)	In addition to the spring flowers, rotting fruit may be used by non-nectar feeding
Chickasaw Plum (<i>Prunus angustifolia</i>)	Ditto
Summersweet or Sweet Pepperbush(<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>)	Several cultivars of this shrub are available.
Buttonbush (<i>Cephalanthes occidentalis</i>)	White globular flowers. A small understory wetland tree that does fine in yards.
Virginia Sweetspire (<i>Itea virginica</i>)	Shrub with some cultivars available. Okay in some shade and doesn't mind a moist site.
New Jersey Tea (<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>)	A low shrub with white flowers, drought tolerant, attractive to hummingbirds, too.
Dog Bane or Indian Hemp (<i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>)	Perennial herb up to 4' tall.
Butterfly weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>), Swamp Milkweed (<i>A. incarnate</i>)	<i>A. tuberosa</i> is better as a nectar plant than as a monarch caterpillar food plant.
Giant Hyssop or Hummingbird Mint (<i>Agastache spp.</i>)	Most are native to North America. An easy-care, heat tolerant perennial.
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia spp.</i>)	Some cultivars are not visited by butterflies.
<i>Coreopsis spp.</i>	Seem to be more attractive to beetles.
Coneflower, <i>Echinacea spp.</i>	For best nectar stay away from the fancy cultivars—stick with the wild types.
Blazing Star (<i>Liatris spicata</i>)	
Goldenrod (<i>Solidago spp.</i>)	May be invasive.
Thistles (<i>Cirsium spp.</i>)	There are native and introduced thistles out there. The flowers of both are often favorites of swallowtail butterflies and bumble bees.
Mountainmint (<i>Pycnanthemum incanum</i>)	Other native and non-native mints are sometimes good nectar plants.

Horse Mint (<i>Monarda punctata</i>)	An unusual flower used more by bees for nectar than butterflies. Common in the Lowcountry. There are other, domestic <i>Monarda</i> , including a red bee balm that attracts hummingbirds.
Ironweed (<i>Vernonia</i> spp.)	Species range from very tall to mounding. Some take very dry conditions.
Joe Pye Weed (<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>)	Tall perennial, blooms in late summer to fall. There are many other <i>Eupatorium</i> spp., including <i>E. perfoliatum</i> , a white-flowered boneset.
Mist Flower or Hardy Ageratum, <i>Conoclinium coelestinum</i>	A great fall bloomer—good for skippers, fritillaries, and others
Frogfruit, <i>Phyla nodiflora</i>	Nectar and host plant, drought tolerant once established
Pickrel Weed, <i>Pontederia cordata</i>	Summer-blooming aquatic that attracts swallowtails and skippers

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