

MASTER GARDENER Q&A

Cultivating Your Yard and Garden Knowledge

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Q I want to attract more pollinators to my garden, however, I want to grow only natives for ease of care and maintenance. What plants do you suggest?
- Lewis and Clark County

A Pollinators are attracted to plants by a variety of signals, including color, scent, petal texture, light patterns, and nectar. Providing diversity of plant material with these attributes will help draw pollinators into your garden. You might try observing the pollinators that are visiting your garden currently and make note of what plants they are attracted to, then plant more of that or similar plants. If you are starting a garden from scratch or would like to add to the plant material you already have, below are a few ideas to attract pollinators.

- Certain native shrubs, such as American plum, golden current, chokecherry, serviceberry, snowberry, elderberry, wild rose, and rabbitbrush, attract pollinators.
- Common pollinator-friendly herbaceous perennials include columbine, bee balm, clover, yarrow, blanket flower, prairie sunflower, dotted gayfeather, purple coneflower, and just about any type of penstemon or aster.

One of the most important considerations in planting a pollinator garden is to make sure something is blooming all season long to ensure a consistent food source for the pollinators. If you would like to learn more about native plants for pollinators, the USDA has a great publication that was produced in cooperation with MSU Extension in Missoula County called *Montana Native Plants for Pollinator-Friendly Plantings*. You can find it online at https://www.plants.usda.gov/pollinators/Montana_Native_Plants_for_Pollinator-Friendly_Plantings.pdf

Q I visited a demonstration garden on a recent trip to Casper, Wyoming, that had selected plants for the Rocky Mountain region. I believe it was a program from Colorado State University. Can you tell me what the program is and where I can find more information?
- Park County

A The demonstration garden you visited is likely a Plant Select® Garden. Instituted over 25 years ago, the Plant Select program is a non-profit collaboration between Colorado State University and Denver Botanic Gardens, that focuses on researching and testing plant material adapted to the Rocky Mountain region.

Plants in the program, branded as Plant Select, must undergo a series of tests to show that they thrive with less water, are adapted to a broad range of site conditions, have positive environmental impacts, are unique, are disease and insect resistant, provide lasting beauty, are non-invasive, and are hardy in challenging climates. There are over 60 Plant Select demonstration gardens across Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. The Montana locations include the in Bozeman Public Library; Tizer Botanical Gardens in Jefferson City; and two locations in Billings, Home on the Range Gardens and one being built at Zoo Montana.

The Plant Select program has two books currently in publication, *Durable Plants for the Garden-A Plant Select Guide*, and coming out in May, *Pretty Tough Plants - 135 Resilient, Water-Smart Choices for a Beautiful Garden*. You can find out more about the program at www.plantselect.org.

Additionally, on their website research cultural information about plants they have released and where to purchase them, design ideas, current news events about the program, how to become a member, and what's new for 2017, including one of my favorites, the Sungari redbead cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster racemiflorus* var. *soongoricus*).

Q I am having trouble growing anything on the north side of my home except chickweed. Can you suggest some perennials that grow well in shade?
- Missoula County

A Determining how much shade per day that side of your house gets can be beneficial in choosing the right plant material for the site. As a general rule, partial sun is between four and six hours of sun per day, partial shade is two to four hours, and full shade is less than two hours of sun per day. There are many perennials that do fine in partial to full shade. If you want traditional perennials with flowers, try Astilbe, Brunnera, Hydrangea, Helleborus, primrose (*Primula*), bugleweed (*Ajuga*), Columbine (*Aquilegia*), and bleeding heart (*Dicentra*).

There are also some great foliage/greenery plants that do well in more shaded areas such as ferns, mosses, dead nettle (*Lamium*), Hosta, and one of my favorites, coral bells (*Heuchera*). Coral bells have small and unique flowers, but it is the leaf color, size, and variegation combinations (over 250 different ones) that lend this plant to many design options.

If you are looking for an attractive ground cover that will fill in the area, try Brunnera, dead nettle (*Lamium*), Japanese spurge (*Pachysandra terminalis*), sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*), or bugleweed (*Ajuga*). Each will grow well in most conditions in Montana.

Finally, for bulbs that grow well in shade, try snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*). They reach about one foot in height and put on quite a show of white flowers early in the spring.

This isn't an exhaustive list of the plant material you can grow in shade in Montana gardens, but a short list of what we recommend. If you would like to find more plants that will thrive in your area in low-light conditions, visit your local nurseries. They should know what will work in your specific location.



*Do you have Master Gardener questions?
Send them to bssa@montana.edu,
subject: Master Gardener.*

ASK STEWARD

Dear Steward,

In the past several years, I've frequently walked out into my yard or garden and noticed my plants looking a little sickly and wondered why. Is there any way I can figure out what is going on before it's too late to save them?

— Sickly Sal

Dear Sal,

You are in luck! Montana State University and Montana State University Extension have resources available to diagnose the troubles with your yard and garden plants. Montana State University Extension has offices around the state that serve every county in Montana. If you see a problem, you can call the local county or reservation Extension agent and ask for their assistance. In some cases, they may come to your property to look at the plant(s) and try to help you diagnose the problem.

In other situations, the agent may ask you to bring in a sample of the plant(s) affected so they can diagnose the problem in the office. If the problem is tricky and hard to diagnose, the agent may offer to send the sample to the Schutter Diagnostic Laboratory, located on campus at Montana State University. This lab is staffed with diagnosticians that can then evaluate the sample and provide a report back to the agent and client regarding the diagnosis.

If you are asked to bring a sample to the Extension office, try to provide a sample that shows both the good and the bad, which means one that appears healthy on one end and sickly on the other. If you do this, the agent and diagnosticians will have as much information as possible to diagnose the problem. Also, you will be asked to fill out a form describing the plant, its surroundings, current and past management, etc. so those trying to help you can get a feel for the entire situation surrounding your sick plant.

To locate your county or reservation agent, go to the MSU Extension website (www.msuxextension.org) and click on "Local Offices." For more information on the Schutter Diagnostic Lab, visit their website at <http://diagnostics.montana.edu/>. ■

Have a question for *Ask Steward*? Please send it to bssa@montana.edu or bigskysmallacres@montana.edu.