

Trees for Pollinators (published 2026-02-21)  
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**There's still time to reserve trees for Tennessee Tree Day! Go to this site for details and to reserve trees:**  
**[tectn.org/tennesseetreeday.html](http://tectn.org/tennesseetreeday.html)**

**And get ready to plant your trees with thousands of other Tennesseans on Saturday, March 21<sup>st</sup>.**

We enjoy trees for their beauty, fall color, and cool shade. We also enjoy the tasty products our trees provide that depend on pollinators for fruit and nut development. Pollinators need trees too. For example, trees provide pollinators with nesting and resting places, shelter, and protection from predators and severe weather. The leaves may also serve as food for butterfly and moth caterpillars. It's nature working in balance.

Certain trees are excellent sources for pollinators. For example, native maple trees, such as red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), are wonderful for pollinators, including bees, butterflies, wasps, flies, and birds. They bloom early and even better, they provide amazing fall color for all of us to enjoy.

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is another excellent resource for pollinators. It attracts butterflies, bees, wasps, flies, hummingbirds, and beetles. The beautiful pink blossoms in early spring attract loads of pollinators, it is a host plant for larva, and the pods are enjoyed by songbirds.

For something different, how about a persimmon tree (*Diospyros virginiana*). It has lovely, scented blossoms in spring and produces a sweet fruit in the fall. This tree is dioicous, meaning you'll need a male and female tree to produce blossoms and fruit.

Oak trees including pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), black oak (*Quercus velutina*), and red oak (*Quercus rubra*) are the champions of keystone plants supporting 400-500 different pollinators. "Keystone plants are native plants critical to the food web and necessary for many wildlife species to complete their life cycle. Without keystone plants in the landscape, butterflies, native bees, and birds will not thrive. 96% of our terrestrial birds rely on insects supported by keystone plants." (from National Wildlife Federation, Keystone Native Plants, Eastern Temperate Forests - Ecoregion 8, [https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Garden-for-Wildlife/Keystone-Plants/NWF-GFW-keystone-plant-list-ecoregion-8-eastern-temperate-forests.pdf?sc\\_lang=en&hash=C475FADDFCC2622C7539F25935F5DAA1](https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Garden-for-Wildlife/Keystone-Plants/NWF-GFW-keystone-plant-list-ecoregion-8-eastern-temperate-forests.pdf?sc_lang=en&hash=C475FADDFCC2622C7539F25935F5DAA1) )

For a smaller space, consider the native spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) which grows only 10 to 12 feet tall and wide. It is a host for a number of butterfly larvae and other pollinators. Both male and female plants are needed to produce fruit, which songbirds love. It has beautiful tiny green-yellow blossoms in spring and yellow leaves in the fall.

Another small native tree is the button bush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) which normally grows to 12 feet tall and 8 feet wide. From June to September, the fragrant white flowers grace the

branches. It is popular with a wide range of pollinators. Songbirds and wildlife enjoy the fruit produced. The tree/shrub likes moisture and is perfect for a rain garden.

One other small tree is a favorite of mine – witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*). It can grow up to 15 to 20 feet tall. The leaves have a fascinating texture but the thing that I love is the flower that appears in January to February. They have a yellow spidery, crinkly appearance that is enchanting and certainly welcome in winter.

If you have room for a large tree, the tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a good choice. It attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. The showy flowers are tulip-shaped, and twigs have a sweet, spicy scent.

The University of Tennessee has a great list of native trees for the state, Native Trees for Tennessee, available at: <https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/SP515.pdf>

Another great resource to learn more about these trees is North Carolina Extension Gardener Toolbox at <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/>. Check details to be ensure you choose the right tree for the right place.

There are also some great videos about trees at UTHORT's YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

And Washington County's YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/@utextensionwashingtoncounty>

The sites listed below also have information about pollinators and the trees and shrubs that support them.

“Trees and Shrubs for Pollinators,” <https://extension.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/trees-forever-trees-and-shrubs-for-pollinators.pdf>

“Native Trees and Shrubs for Pollinators,” [https://pollinators.msu.edu/sites/\\_pollinators/assets/File/treesshrubsposter.pdf](https://pollinators.msu.edu/sites/_pollinators/assets/File/treesshrubsposter.pdf)

### **How do I ask a question?**

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at [www.netmga.net](http://www.netmga.net). Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

*The Master Gardener Program is offered by the University of Tennessee Extension. The purpose of the Master Gardener program is to train people as horticultural-educated volunteers. These volunteers work in partnership with the local Extension office in their counties to expand educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.*