

Shaded Woodland Pollinator Gardens in Brookline

These shaded pollinator gardens are based on woodland and woodland edge plant communities that thrive in well-drained soils beneath the tree canopy and are an excellent opportunity to add restorative natural habitat to shady garden spaces with moderate to dry soil.

In addition to providing many benefits to pollinators and songbirds, these gardens provide vegetated buffers that reduce the amount of rainwater that goes from roofs into storm drains and improve water quality by infiltrating the rainwater into the soil.

Key Considerations for Shaded Woodland Pollinator Gardens:

These gardens are based on woodland plant communities and are well-suited for garden spaces, balconies, or patios that have

- 3 hours or less of sun per day, dappled sun, or full shade exposures.
- soils that are moderate to dry and drain quickly, or containers that are moderately watered.

Groundcovers and Foliage	Height & Spacing	Seasonal Interest	Wildlife Supported
Pennsylvania sedge <i>(Carex pennsylvanica)</i>	6" tp 1' high 6" apart		Supports bees, butterflies, and moths Larval host for 36 species, including leaf miner moths and Appalachian brown butterflies Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.
Marginal wood fern <i>(Dryopteris marginalis)</i>	1-2' high 2' apart		Larval host for several moth species, including the ghostly ferns, marsh ferns, and conifer swifts. Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.
Christmas fern <i>(Polystichum acrostichoides)</i>	1-2' high 1-2' apart	red fronds in spring, green in winter.	Supports songbirds. Larval host for 4 species, including serpentine webworms and brown angle shades. Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant
King Solomon's seal <i>(Polygonatum biflorum)</i>	1-4' high 1-2' apart	white spring flowers, blue fall berries	Supports bees, including bumblebees, and songbirds. Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.

Spring and Summer Perennials	Height & Spacing	Seasonal Interest	Pollinators Supported
Dutchman's breeches (<i>Dicentra cucullaria</i>)	3-5" high 6-8" apart	white early spring ephemeral	Supports early bees Deer and rabbit resistant
squirrel corn (<i>Dicentra canadensis</i>)	3-5" high 6"-1' apart	white early spring ephemeral	Supports early bees Deer and rabbit resistant
great white trillium, white wakerobin (<i>Trillium grandiflorum</i>)	6"-1' high 1-2' apart	White early spring ephemeral	Supports early bees (turns pink after pollination)
blunt-lobed hepatica (<i>Anemone americana</i>)	3-6" high 6-8" apart	white, blue, pink early spring ephemeral	Supports early bees Deer and rabbit resistant
trout lily, dog-tooth violet (<i>Erythronium americanum</i>)*	2-5" high 4-10" apart	yellow early spring ephemeral	Supports bees. Deer and Rabbit resistant. Plant under deciduous trees for early spring sun. Deer and rabbit resistant
striped cream violet (<i>Viola striata</i>)	8" to 1' high 8" to 1' apart	white spring flowers	Supports bees and butterflies Larval host for fritillary butterflies.
woodland phlox (<i>Phlox divaricata</i>)	1' high 1' apart	blue spring flowers	Supports bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
running foamflower (<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>)	1' high 1-2' apart	pink spring flowers	Supports bees and butterflies. Larval host for Eastern comma, mourning cloak, and question mark butterflies Rain garden slopes and edges Deer and rabbit resistant
Canada anemone (<i>Anemone canadensis</i>)*	1-2' apart 3-5' apart	White spring flowers.	Supports bees and butterflies. Larval host for veiled ear moths and the one-lined Sparganothis. Compaction tolerant.
Eastern red columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)*	1-2' high 1' apart	red late spring flowers	Supports long-tongued bees and butterflies as well as hummingbirds. Larval host for the columbine duskywing. Rain garden slopes and edges Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.
Partridgeberry (<i>Mitchella repens</i>)	1-2" high 1' apart	white summer flowers	Supports bees. Drought-tolerant

Summer and Fall Perennials	Height & Spacing	Seasonal Interest	Pollinators Supported
black cohosh <i>(Actaea racemosa)</i>	3-5' high 2-3' apart	white summer flowers	Supports bees. Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant. Listed as an endangered plant species in Massachusetts.
wild bergamot <i>(Monarda fistulosa)*</i>	2-4' high 1-2' apart	red summer and fall flowers	Supports bees, including at-risk bumblebees, butterflies, songbirds, and hummingbirds. Rain garden slopes and edges Deer and rabbit resistant.
woodland sunflower <i>(Helianthus divaricatus)*</i>	2-4' high 1-3' apart	yellow late summer flowers	Supports bees, butterflies, and songbirds Keystone larval host for many species, including silvery checkerspot, common loopers, clymene haploas, and giant leopard moths. Drought-tolerant.
blue wood aster, heart-leaved aster <i>(Symphyotrichum cordifolium)</i>	1-3' high 1-2' apart	blue late summer and fall flowers	Supports bees, butterflies, and songbirds. Larval host for the pearl crescent. Drought-tolerant.
white wood aster <i>(Eurybia divaricata)</i>	1-2' high 1-2' apart	white fall flowers	Supports bees and songbirds. Larval host for 2 species of dichomeris moths. Drought-tolerant.
bluestem goldenrod or wreath goldenrod <i>(Solidago caesia)</i>	1-3' high 1-2' apart	yellow early fall flowers	Supports bees, especially bumblebees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Keystone larval host for many species, including blackberry loopers, brown-hooded owlets, goldenrod hooded owlets, green leuconyctas, wavy-lined emeralds, and beautiful phanetas. Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.
zig-zag goldenrod <i>(Solidago flexicaulis)</i>	1-3' high 1-3' apart	yellow fall flowers	Supports bees, especially bumblebees, butterflies, and songbirds. Keystone larval host for many species, including twirlers, brown hooded owlets, and bilobed dichomeris moths. Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.

Subcanopy Trees and Shrubs	Height & Spacing	Seasonal Interest	Pollinators Supported
alternate-leaf dogwood, pagoda dogwood <i>(Swida alternifolia)</i>	10-20' high 6-15' apart	white spring flowers, blue fall berries	Supports bees, butterflies, and songbirds. Larval host for spring azure butterflies. Deer and rabbit resistant.
flowering big-bracted dogwood <i>(Benthamidia Florida)</i>	12-20' high 8-15' apart	white flowers in spring, red fall fruits	Supports butterflies and songbirds. Larval host for spring azure butterflies. Deer and rabbit resistant.
American hazelnut <i>(Corylus americana)</i>	5-9' high 4-6' apart	white spring blooms American hazelnuts are edible	While primarily pollinated by the wind, this plant does support bees and songbirds. Larval host for saturniidae moths: luna, secropia, polyphemus, and io. Drought resistant.
black huckleberry <i>(Gaylussacia baccata)</i>	1-3' high 2-3' tall	pink spring flowers, black edible berries	Supports bees, butterflies, and songbirds. Larval host for several species, including huckleberry sphinx moths and brown elfin and Henry's elfin butterflies Drought-tolerant. Deer and rabbit resistant.

Example Shaded Woodland Gardens

If you have space, consider adding trees or shrubs that are a part of the shaded woodland plant community to your garden. The shaded woodland trees and shrubs are all sub-canopy species that have the same moisture and sun requirements as the rest of the plant community.

Example 1: A foliage-based shaded woodland garden

1. Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*)
2. squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*)
3. striped cream violet (*Viola striata*)
4. Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*)
5. marginal wood fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*)
6. Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)
7. King Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*)
8. running foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)
9. wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
10. blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolium*)
11. bluestem goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*)

Example 2: A shaded woodland's edge wildflower garden

1. blunt-lobed hepatica (*Anemone americans*)
2. great white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)
3. trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*)*
4. great white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)
5. running foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*)
6. Eastern red columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*)*
7. black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*)
8. wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
9. woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)
10. white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*)
11. bluestem goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*)
12. zig-zag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*)

Example 3: A shaded woodland garden with a focus on ground covers

1. Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*)
2. squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*)
3. striped cream violet (*Viola striata*)
4. Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*)
5. marginal wood fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*)
6. Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)
7. woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*)
8. partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)
9. Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*)*
10. blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolium*)
11. white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*)
12. zig-zag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*)

* Plant in garden locations with the most sun. These plants appreciate 2-3 hours of sun, or more if there is a portion of the garden space that is less shaded.

References

More information about plants in shaded woodland gardens and woodland plant communities is available from

- The Native Plant Trust, including their website and the book *The Northeast Native Plant Primer* by Uli Lorimer
- Grow Native Massachusetts (formerly the New England Wildflower Society), and the book *Native Plants for New England Gardens* by Mark Richardson and Dan Jaffe.
- *Designing Gardens with Flora of the American East* by Carolyn Summers and Kate Brittenham.
- *Planting for Climate Resilience in Northeast Landscapes* by the Wild Seed Project
- The Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center.
- Leaves for Wildlife
- Cornell Botanic Gardens