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## Color of Year, Ultra Violet, Good Match for Bees

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Each year, Pantone announces its color of the year with the 2018 finalist being ‘Ultra Violet’. Because of its celebrity status, this intriguing shade of purple will permeate fashion, home decorating and perhaps even the plant world. This will be great for bees and some other pollinators.

Nobel prize winner, Karl von Frisch discovered bees can see in color about 100 years ago. They have 3 different photoreceptors in their eyes that distinguish 3 distinct primary colors, blue, green and ultra violet. All other colors that they see are combinations of these three primary colors. That makes flowers in shades of violet, purple and blue particularly attractive to bees.

When growing flowers for pollinators, plant in groups. A single specimen will be harder for bees and other pollinators to find and may not provide enough nectar or pollen to make return visits fruitful. Keep in mind that single flowers provide easier access to pollen or nectar than double varieties. Also, before purchasing plants, find out if they were treated with insecticides.

Purple hues are such a delightful color in the garden. They blend well with cool pinks, blues and whites and accentuate warmer yellow, oranges and reds. Right now, purple crocuses and bluish scillas planted in sheltered locations, like next to foundations, have begun to bloom. They can provide food for early foragers. Both are small bulbs that naturalize readily and are planted in the fall.

Another kind of spring flowering bulb that is much loved by bees and other pollinators would be members of the allium family. There are a number of species but the ones that seem to command the greatest attention by bees are the giant ornamental alliums like ‘Globemaster’. The large globe-shaped clusters of purple flowers are also show-stoppers in the garden. The leaves of common culinary chives will enhance your meals while the lilac, spherical flower heads will provide nourishment for bees.

Look to the herb garden for several other purple pollinator plants. Low growing thymes may have purple, white, red or pinkish flowers but all varieties will be covered with bees when in bloom. Hyssop plants (*Hyssop officinalis*) were brought to the U.S. by early colonists who treasured them for their medicinal properties. Many species of bees find the bluish flower spikes quite irresistible and this well-behaved plant is a valued addition to herb or perennial gardens.

Anise hyssop is really an agastache not a true hyssop. The leaves and light purple flowers have a delightful scent. This bee-luring plant is a self-seeding, short-lived perennial. I planted it over 10 years ago and a few new seedlings pop up every year to replace some that did not make it through the winter. It reaches about 30 inches in height as does similarly sized bee balm (*Monarda* species). Hummingbirds also find bee balm attractive, especially the red varieties. Seek out cultivars like ‘Purple Rooster’ and ‘Blue Stocking’ for the bees. Wild bergamot (*M. fistulosa*) reaches 4 feet in height and produces many spikes of purple flowers.

Perennial salvias are another high scoring species for bees. Look for selections of *S. nemorosa* or *S. sylvestris* that grow in nice neat clumps usually no more than 18 to 24 inches high. Many salvia species send up vibrant violet blue flower spikes in early summer but ‘Purple Rain’ produces smoky purple blooms from June through September.

Veronicas also produce spiky flower stalks. My favorite is ‘Blue Giant’ which grows up to 3 feet tall and produces branching spikes of violet blue florets in mid-summer. Not only are they a favorite of bees but they make great cut flowers as well.

Come late summer and aster blossoms become pollinator magnets providing bees, butterflies and others with pollen and nectar. New England asters can be found in purple and pink hues as well as snowy white. For even later flowers, plant the Tatarian aster (*A. tataricus*). This tall, gorgeous perennial can get up to 6 feet tall and is covered with single purple blooms. It does like to spread a bit so give it some room.

There are a number of other purple to bluish flowering plants that will be delightful additions to your garden beds as well as serving as an attractant to draw in bees and other pollinators. A few more to mention include columbine, catmint, common mallow, purple coneflowers, echinops, hardy geraniums and scabiosa. Include as many as you can in your garden beds, containers and foundation plantings. Bees will appreciate your help and in return pollinate your plants do that they can perpetuate themselves.

For more suggestions on pollinator plants and their cultural requirements or for answers to other gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.