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Contact: Phyllis Stiles, Director
Bee City USA
beecityusa@gmail.com
828-545-4282

IT'S SPRING!

PLANT SOMETHING TO FEED OUR HARD-WORKING POLLINATOR FRIENDS

As the days grow longer, many of us take stock of our yards and pore over seed catalogues. Before you go shopping this year, Asheville's Tree Commission and Sustainability Advisory Committee on Energy and the Environment (SACEE) want you to know about a recommended native plant list to provide the food and butterfly larval host sites that native bees, butterflies and other pollinators need to thrive.

On their recommendations, Asheville City Council voted unanimously to become the inaugural *Bee City USA* on June 26, 2012.

Now, Bee City USA has announced a list of plants that provide larval host sites for butterflies (among the pickiest of all pollinators) and nectar and pollen for native bees, moths, and hummingbirds throughout the growing year. After all, nectar is their carbohydrate and pollen provides protein for bees (both honey and native bees).

The list of recommended pollinator-friendly native plants may be downloaded from the "Resources/References" sections of beecityusa.org or ashevilletreemap.org or wncbees.org. It includes bloom time, bloom color, and the pollinators served.

More than one-third of what we eat (think blueberries, almonds, chocolate, squash) along with medicines, beverages, and fibers come from plants that need animals to move the pollen from the plant's male part to its female part. Unless you enjoy lots of grains, meals would be pretty boring without them. Honey bees play that role in about eighty percent of cases; otherwise, thousands of species of native bees and other insects provide that service.

Before European settlers introduced honey bees to America in the 1600s, native bees did the majority of our continent's pollination work. Commercial pollination with migratory beehives began much later in the

1950s. Today, honey bee pollination is responsible for more than \$15 billion in increased crop value each year, according to the USDA.

The Tree Commission and SACEE endorsed the Bee City USA resolution because both honey bee and native pollinator populations are at great risk due to habitat loss, disease and inappropriate pesticide use. This is not surprising when you consider that many pollinators are frequently treated as pests rather than the beneficial insects they are.

Consciously or unconsciously, we have degraded their food sources by planting non-native exotic trees, shrubs, and plants that many native pollinators avoid as they co-evolved over millions of years with native plants for their mutual benefit. As a result, most native pollinators find exotic plants unrecognizable as food, nesting site, or as larval host. Sometimes, the exotic plants are even toxic to them.

Equally problematic, some of the hybridized plants have had their pollen or nectar genetically removed because we have come to value weed and insect-free lawns over a diversity of native plants that support complex food webs.

Making Asheville more pollinator-friendly starts with planting a diversity of native flowering plants that have nectar and pollen. Honey bees usually fly in a three-mile radius from their hives, but some native bees have very small home ranges and can fly as little as 500 feet. They need a succession of flowers nearby throughout the growing season. Supporting them in urban and suburban areas promotes genetic diversity that may be a key to the survival of their species.

If you are thinking, “But I’m allergic to pollen!” you are probably allergic to pollen from wind-pollinated trees and grasses rather than plants pollinated by animals. Wind-pollinated plants have to produce LOTS of lightweight pollen to be carried on the wind because there is no guarantee that the pollen will ever reach its intended destination (not your eyes and nose).

Even though flower generalists like honey bees can forage nonnative invasive species like kudzu, privet, and butterfly bush, we urge you to remove them whenever possible. Help the native pollinators, as well as honey bees, by planting the native species on the Bee City USA recommended list; or fruit trees; or herbs like mint, oregano, parsley, and lavender; or flowering annuals like old-fashioned cosmos, zinnias and single sunflowers.

Most of us can raise flowers and make Asheville not only an even more beautiful place, but also a safe haven for pollinators. If we take care of the pollinators, they will take care of us.

The Asheville Tree Commission is a citizen committee created to uphold the City's commitment to Tree City USA. SACEE is a citizen committee created to focus on Asheville city government as a model for the community regarding energy reduction and clean air initiatives. Learn more about both commissions at www.ashevillenc.gov. Bee City USA encourages municipalities to champion honey bees and other pollinators. Learn more at www.beecityusa.org.