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Summer Bloomers for Honeybees

A hot, dry summer is not ideal for beekeeping enthusiasts. For many years, there has been a slump in honey production between the clovers of spring and the sunflowers of fall. The heat and dry of the summer make it hard for flowers to be pollinated, so most species simply choose not to bloom during these months. Honey production can slow considerably during this time. Honeybees spend more time collecting water to cool down the hive and have to visit more of a dwindling flower supply to bring home a load of nectar and pollen. While there are a few annual and perennial flowers that bloom in the summer's heat, many require maintenance, reseeding, or space limitations. Fortunately, there are a limited number of tree and bush selections that also bloom during the summer. Having some of these in a landscape can provide a bolstered food supply not only for honeybees but also for the many other pollinators that might struggle in the summer. Larger woody species require less maintenance after a few years of establishment.

The information from the chart were obtained from Kansasnativeplants.com, K-State's Horticulture Info Center, and Kansas Forest Service websites, and then adjusted some for this area. An attempt was made to put them in chorological bloom order as well. Of course, plants will bloom sooner or later depending on the weather of the season.

Trees		May	June	July	
Hawthorn		■			
Catalpa		■			
Mulberry	<i>White & Red</i>	■	■		
Golden Rain	<i>Possibly Invasive</i>	■	■		
Soapberry	<i>Western</i>	■	■		
Kentucky Coffee		■	■		
Basswood	<i>Linden</i>		■	■	
Bushes		May	June	July	Aug
Elderberry		■			
Sumac	<i>Some are invasive</i>	■	■		
Buttonbush			■		
Devil's Stick				■	
Hydrangea	<i>Smooth</i>			■	■
Lead Plant				■	■
Beautyberry				■	■
Seven-Son	<i>Not native</i>				■

My favorite tree for pollinators is the Basswood tree, also called the American Linden. For the bushes, one exceptional choice is our native button bush.

Basswood (Tilia americana)



The basswood tree, also called American Linden, has a couple of named varieties. There are a few of these in the urban landscape, but it is odd that there aren't considerably more. They are fast-growing and fairly long-lived, with a fantastic shape and appearance. The preferred habitat is moist soils in eastern Kansas. They do well in most yard and park landscapes without much care. The basswood fruit is small and unobtrusive. When these trees bloom, expect a sweet scent and a buzz of pollinators of all kinds. Note that the European *Tilia*, called Lindens, are also great options. Lots of types and hybrids to choose from.

Buttonbush

I can personally attest to the coolness of the buttonbush, having planted a row of them at my parents' farm and at the Extension office. They quickly grew into big, spreading bushes in just a few years in both locations. Their flowers are fluffy white, perfectly spherical, inch-diameter balls that grow in bunches. Technically a composite flower, but like no other. Buttonbushes are native, growing along streambanks and marshes. They prefer moist to wetland soils, which are easy to find in southeast Kansas. Also, buttonbushes are available from the Kansas Forest Service in their spring sale. Note there is a fair amount of genetic variation in the species, so the final form might be a smaller tree or more of a big multi-stemmed bush.



For more information about trees, bushes, or any flowering plant, please call your local extension office. Also, check out Kansasforests.org for Kansas Forest Service information.

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