

SANTA FE POLLINATOR HABITAT KITS

Planting Guidance



Protecting the Life
that Sustains Us
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Each Santa Fe pollinator habitat kit, like this Low to Medium Water Kit (inset), consists of eight species of drought-tolerant, pollinator-attractive native wildflowers and one native tree or shrub. These plants require care and attention in the first year or two, but are low maintenance over the long term (main). Photos: Xerces Society / Kaitlin Haase.

Thank you for your interest and work in conserving pollinators in Santa Fe. In planting this kit, you are an essential partner in urban pollinator conservation! This handout includes instructions for planting and follow-up care for successful habitat establishment.

Background

New Mexico is home to more than 300 species of butterflies and over 1,000 species of native bees. In the Santa Fe area, pollinator habitat has been replaced with urban infrastructure and non-native plants. Fortunately, many pollinators are able to thrive in urban areas where landscaping includes a diversity of native plant species free of pesticides.

One important step we can take to protect these important animals is to increase the native flowering plants available to these species by creating connected, climate-resilient pollinator habitat throughout urban Santa Fe. In order to address pollinator declines and habitat loss, The Xerces Society has partnered with Santa Ana Native Plant Nursery to produce these kits and make them available to residents and organizations in Santa Fe interested in creating pollinator habitat.

What's In This Kit?

Each kit contains 33 native, drought-tolerant plants including variety of perennial wildflowers and an early or late blooming shrub documented to be attractive to native pollinators. The following page includes the species list for both kit types.



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Low Water Pollinator Habitat Kit

BLOOM PERIOD	COMMON NAME	SPECIES	PLANT TYPE	MAX. SIZE (height × width)
early-mid	Apache plume	<i>Fallugia paradoxa</i>	shrub	6 ft. × 6 ft.
early-mid	Tufted evening primrose	<i>Oenothera caespitosa</i>	perennial	1.5 ft. × 1.5 ft.
early-mid	Pineleaf penstemon*	<i>Penstemon pinifolius*</i>	perennial	1 ft. × 2 ft.
mid	Desert four o'clock*	<i>Mirabilis multiflora*</i>	perennial	2 ft. × 4 ft.
mid	Engelmann daisy	<i>Engelmannia peristenia</i>	perennial	2 ft. × 2 ft.
mid	Upright prairie coneflower	<i>Ratibida columnifera</i>	perennial	1–3 ft. × 2 ft.
mid	Horsetail milkweed	<i>Asclepias subverticillata</i>	perennial	2 ft. × 2 ft.
mid	Chocolate flower	<i>Berlandiera lyrata</i>	perennial	1–1.5 ft. × 2 ft.
mid-late	Desert mule ear	<i>Scabrethia scabra</i>	perennial	1–2 ft. × 3–4 ft.
late	Threadleaf groundsel	<i>Senecio flaccidus</i>	perennial	3 ft. × 2 ft.

* Species substituting *Penstemon strictus*

Low to Medium Water Pollinator Habitat Kit

BLOOM PERIOD	COMMON NAME	SPECIES	PLANT TYPE	MAX. SIZE (height × width)
early	Threeleaf sumac	<i>Rhus trilobata</i>	shrub	5–7 ft. × 3–12 ft.
mid	Showy milkweed†	<i>Asclepias speciosa†</i>	perennial	2 ft. × 1.5 ft.
mid	White prairie clover	<i>Dalea candida</i>	perennial	2 ft. × 2 ft.
mid	Sacred datura	<i>Datura wrightii</i>	perennial	3 ft. × 4 ft.
mid	Hairy false goldenaster	<i>Heterotheca villosa</i>	perennial	2 ft. × 2 ft.
mid	Bee balm†	<i>Monarda fistulosa†</i>	perennial	1–2 ft. × 1 ft.
mid	Cota	<i>Thelesperma megapotamicum</i>	perennial	1–3 ft. × 1 ft.
mid–late	MacDougal verbena	<i>Verbena macdougalii</i>	perennial	2–3 ft. × 1 ft.
mid–late	Blanketflower	<i>Gaillardia pulchella</i>	biennial	2 ft. × 1–2 ft.

† Species with medium water maintenance; all other species have low water needs once established.

Tips for Plant Establishment

The plants in your kit are ideally suited for the Santa Fe area, but they will need good care to get started. Follow these guidelines to ensure the success of your pollinator habitat.

1. Timing

Plant your kits within one week of pickup to allow time for root establishment before the first hard freeze and to minimize time in pots. If an early frost occurs, covering your newly planted kit with cardboard boxes or light blankets could help prevent plants from freezing.

2. Weed Management

Before and after planting, manage weeds so they aren't crowding out the habitat kit plants. Providing a layer of top mulch (around the plants but not right next to the new tiny stems) may help protect against weed encroachment, and will also help maintain soil moisture.

3. Soil Amendments

These native plants are adapted to the soils of the high deserts of New Mexico and do not require supplemental organic material or nutrients in the form of compost or fertilizers, though bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*) and showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*) do respond well to some added organic material. Most species in both kit types do best in well-drained soils.

4. Plant Spacing

Kit transplants will be very small and will need space to grow after planting. Refer to the habitat kit plant lists above for max height and width of each species to determine spacing of your planting area.

5. Design and Location

Plants from each kit can all be planted in one location or in different areas on your property. Identify microclimates around your yard that are suitable for certain species, such as a high and sunny location for chocolate flower (*Berlandiera lyrata*) or a water-collecting area for showy milkweed and bee balm. The threeleaf sumac (*Rhus trilobata*) tolerates planting on slopes.



These kits feature pollinator-attractive species that bloom consecutively through the growing season. Here, an American bumble bee (*Bombus pensylvanicus*) visits blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*), a species in the Low to Medium Water kit. Photo: Xerces Society / Kaitlin Haase.

Consider planting all four individuals of one species from a kit in close proximity to attract pollinators to a single-species clump and to easily track plant survival. You could use landscaping flags or other easy-to-spot markers to locate the plants in your garden until they're large enough to see easily, especially since some of the plants may disappear completely over the winter.

6. Irrigation

Plantings will need supplemental irrigation to get established; careful observation to adapt the watering schedule for your location is essential. Keep soil moist for the first month after planting. Slowly decrease watering frequency into autumn, and water every three to four weeks in winter unless we have deep snow. In 2026, the first full season of plant growth, plants should be irrigated deeply at least 2× per week in the heat of summer.

Once well established (that is, after the first year), irrigation can be gradually decreased. Generally, by the third year after planting, most kit species will need only monthly irrigation, or no irrigation at all except in extreme drought. Drip irrigation is ideal for transplants but be careful not to overwater; watch your seedlings carefully and if they look like they're yellowing, or starting to bend over and look droopy; they may be getting too much water. Most of the species in these kits are more sensitive to overwatering than underwatering.

7. Planting

Dig holes a little deeper than, and 2–3× as wide as the plant's container. If your soil is heavily compacted, break up soil deeper down and surrounding the hole to allow root penetration. Irrigate plants in pots thoroughly before planting. Water the holes and allow water to drain just before planting. Backfill the hole so that it is about the same depth as the container. Adding sand to the bottom of the planting holes can help improve drainage and curb damage from overwatering. Gently remove the plant from the container, break up roots if root bound, and place it in the hole. Gently pack soil around the plant. It is important not to make the holes too deep; the base of the plant should be at the same level as the surrounding soil. You can use any extra soil to make a small berm around the plant to help capture water for the first couple of weeks. Water the plant well.

8. Protecting from Animals

Birds, rodents, or other animals may sample your new plants even if they would not normally eat these particular species when mature. If you know you have rabbits or other plant predators, be prepared to protect your plants for at least the first six months. Small wire cages or other physical barriers are the best protectors. If gophers are present, line the holes with chicken wire before planting. Sprays that repel herbivores are generally less effective than physical barriers and may be toxic or repellent to insects feeding on the plants; they are not recommended for use on this habitat planting. If a plant does get eaten, it may grow back if the plant's roots were strong (and the nibbling does not continue).



Wild bees like this green sweat bee (*Agapostemon* sp.) are frequent visitors of threelobe sumac (*Rhus trilobata*), featured in the Low to Medium Water Kit. Photo: Xerces Society / Kaitlin Haase.

Xerces is here to help!

We are excited to partner with you on creating pollinator habitat. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or need additional guidance (kaitlin.haase@xerces.org). You will find publications about monarchs, pollinators, and habitat restoration work on our website (www.xerces.org), or by following the links provided below.

Additional Resources

Pollinator Habitat

- [Native Plants for Pollinators and Beneficial Insects: Southwest Arizona/Colorado/New Mexico Plateaus](#)
- [Nesting and Overwintering Habitat for Pollinators and Beneficial Insects](#)

Pesticide Exposure and Pest Management

- [Smarter Pest Management: Protecting Pollinators at Home](#)
- [Buying Bee-Safe Plants](#)

Local Water Conservation and Native Plant Gardening Resources

- [Waterwise landscaping \(City of Santa Fe Water Conservation\)](#)
- [Native Plant Society of New Mexico \(Santa Fe Chapter\)](#)
- [Santa Fe Native Plant Project \(Santa Fe Master Gardeners\)](#)

Acknowledgments and Partners

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is a nonprofit focused on protecting the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats. We take our name from the now extinct Xerces Blue butterfly (*Glaucopsyche xerces*), the first butterfly known to go extinct in North America as a result of human activities.

Santa Ana Native Plant Nursery is a wholesale native plant nursery located in the Santa Ana Pueblo specializing in the production of high-quality native plants from locally collected seeds. Their plants are used in wildlife habitat restoration projects, agricultural revegetation projects, erosion control, and urban and rural landscaping.

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AUTHOR: Kaitlin Haase (The Xerces Society). Reviewed by Linda Churchill (Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners). Formatted by Emily May (The Xerces Society).

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