

Lake County
Conservation District

Pollinator Initiative



Seed Mix Guide

&
Monitoring Journal

First Edition - 2026

Lake County Conservation District

Since 1945, the Lake County Conservation District has worked with local landowners and community members to conserve soil, water, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources across the county. Guided by a combination of locally elected and appointed supervisors, the district



focuses on practical, voluntary conservation that supports both healthy ecosystems and productive working lands.

The Pollinator Initiative is one example of this work. By helping residents establish native plantings across farms, yards, and community spaces, the district partners with the community to expand pollinator habitat and strengthen the long-term stewardship of Lake County's landscapes.



*Promoting the wise use of our
natural resources since 1945.*

***To learn more about the district's local
conservation efforts including work to protect
our watershed and soil, visit
LakeCountyConservationDistrict.org or scan***



Working Together Across the Landscape

Lake County includes farms, rangelands, forests, shorelines, and neighborhoods. Across these landscapes, native flowering plants once grew in dense and diverse patterns, providing continuous food for bees, butterflies, birds, and other pollinators.

Today, many of these flowering resources exist in smaller, isolated patches. Lawns, roads, large crop fields, and invasive weeds can create gaps in nectar and pollen, especially in early spring and late fall.

The Pollinator Initiative

A Collective Effort

The Lake County Conservation District launched the Pollinator Initiative in 2016 to help address those gaps. Since then, hundreds of participants have established pollinator plantings across the county, from backyard gardens and pasture margins to roadside and community spaces.

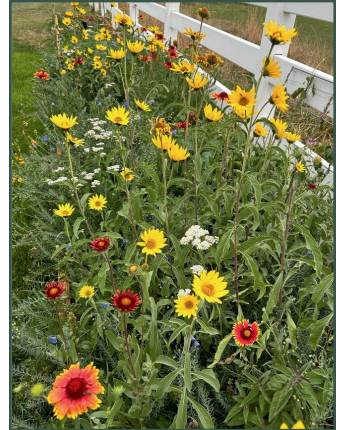
Individually, these plantings vary in size and setting. Together, they increase habitat continuity across the landscape. As pollinators move across Lake County, they rely on a chain of feeding and resting sites. Each planting becomes one link in that network.

Your planting is one part of that network.

Stewardship at this scale is cumulative.

- *Each season builds on the last.*
- *Each planting adds habitat.*
- *Each observation strengthens understanding.*

This guide is intended to support that work.



**Past Pollinator Initiative Participant Garden*

Name:

Planting Address:

Establishment Date:

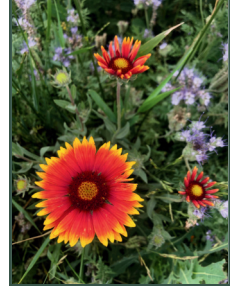
This Guide Is a Powerful Tool

Use this guide to observe, record, and better understand your pollinator plantings over time. Native plantings develop gradually—early growth may be modest, some species may not bloom right away, and seasonal changes are normal.

Stewardship requires observation.









The pages that follow are designed to help you:

- Track planting dates and bloom timing
- Notice which species establish most successfully
- Record pollinator visitation
- Identify seasonal changes



By documenting what you observe, you become more attuned to how your planting functions—helping guide decisions and support long-term success.

Graphic Key

 <p>Bumble Bee Plant <i>We have around 30 bumble bee species in Montana</i></p>	 <p>Larval Host <i>for butterflies and moths</i></p>
 <p>Attracts Beneficial Insects</p>	 <p>Nesting Materials</p>
 <p>Supports Specialist Bees <i>Montana is home to around 450-600 native bee species</i></p>	 <p>Deer Resistant <i>Deer resistant does not equal deer proof</i></p>
 <p>Requires Cold Stratification <i>Seeds need to experience a period of cold conditions</i></p>	 <p>Nest Site <i>Offers a place for bees & insects to live in the winter</i></p>
<p>H = height Annual = lives for one year but may reseed W = width Perennial = lives for two or more years, maturing over time</p>	

Key made with reference to, "Native Plants for Pollinators & Beneficial Insects: Rocky Mountains" from The Xerces Society.

Planting Native

Why it Matters

Native plants are species that occur naturally in western Montana. They evolved alongside our soils, climate patterns, and wildlife. Because of that shared history, they provide ecological benefits that turf grass and most ornamental plants cannot match.

***When we plant native species,
we restore habitat that belongs here.***

Adapted to Local Area



Native plants are suited to our soils, precipitation patterns, and seasonal temperature shifts.

Once established, natives typically:

- *Require less supplemental water*
- *Reduce reliance on fertilizers & pesticides*
- *Improve soil health and reduce erosion*

Their deep and diverse root systems strengthen the land below the surface – not just the landscape above it.

Native Plants Support Pollinators *at Every Stage*

Native plants provide:

- *Essential nectar & pollen*
- *Larval host plants for native insects*
- *Optimal bloom timing*
- *Winter habitat*



Many pollinators depend on specific native host plants to complete their life cycles. *A yard full of flowers is not automatically habitat.* A yard planted with locally adapted native species is.

Pollinators need more than flowers

Many pollinators rely on bare ground, dead wood, undisturbed leaf litter or brush piles, and standing plant stems for nesting and shelter.

What to Expect Over Time



**Year
1**

Establishment

Roots are developing underground. Limited growth and few blooms above ground.



**Year
2**

Growth

More flowers appear and pollinator activity increases.



**Year
3**

Peak Productivity

The garden is established with abundant blooms and high pollinator use.

Maintenance Tip:

Around **4-5 years after establishment**, **reseed or interseed** to maintain diversity and bloom coverage.

Seasonal Habitat Matters

Spring

Early blooms provide pollen and nectar as pollinators emerge.
Watch for new growth and remove early weeds.

Peak bloom and pollinator activity.
Water during dry periods and keep weeds under control.

Summer

Fall

Late flowers support winter pollinator preparation.
Let plants go to seed and consider dormant seeding.

Gardens provide shelter even when dormant.
Leave stems and plant material standing for overwintering habitat.

Winter

4 Simple Steps For Pollinator Success

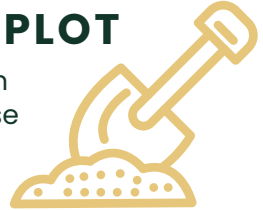
1) PICK THE SPOT



- Pick a sunny space that you will see often
- Know your soil type
- Make sure you have access to water

2) PREP THE PLOT

- Completely clear all competing vegetation
- Solarization, pulling, or careful chemical use
- Visit our website for more site prep info



3) PLANT THE SEED



- Broadcast seed on top of the soil.
- Lightly rake area. *Seeds should remain in the top **1/4 inch** of soil.*
- Cover with mulch or weed-free straw.
- For best results, plant seed **before May 15th** or **after Nov 1st**

4) WATER AND WEED*

- Once you've mulched your plot, water it generously!
- Water once a week during the dry season for the first **two years**.
- Remove any weeds or grass regularly to reduce competition.



**Refer to species pages to determine whether what you are seeing is a weed or a native plant sprout.*

Common First Year Challenges

Weed Pressure - *Regular weeding, especially in year one, will pay in more blooms in year two.*

Limited Flowering - *Perennials prioritize root growth in year one. Year two will yield more blooms.*

Patchy Germination - *Some species require cold stratification and won't sprout until year two*

All this is normal. Patience pays off!

Cold Stratification & Dormant Fall Seeding

Missed the Spring Seeding Window? No Problem!

Many native species evolved to germinate in spring after experiencing winter conditions. This natural process, including exposure to cold, moisture, and time, is called **cold stratification**.

Instead of sprouting immediately, seeds remain dormant through winter. Snowpack and freeze, thaw cycles signal when it is safe to grow. Fall dormant seeding works with this natural cycle.

Why Seed in the Fall?

- Natural timing that mimics winter conditions
- Uses early spring moisture
- Encourages strong root development
- Reduces early weed competition
- Extends the bloom season
- Less seed loss from predation

When to Plant

Fall Seeding works best:

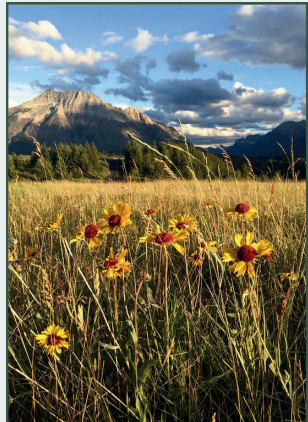
- **After several hard frosts**
- **When soil temperatures are below ~50°F**
- **Before permanent snow cover or frozen ground**

In Lake County, this is typically **early November** to **early December**, depending on weather conditions.

Fall planting is the simplest way to meet cold stratification requirements.

How to Dormant Seed in the Fall:

- Prepare your site and remove all competing vegetation.
- Broadcast seed evenly over the soil surface.
- Lightly rake or press seed into the soil for good seed-to-soil contact. (*Do not bury deeply.*)
- **Allow winter moisture and temperature cycles to do the rest.**
- Additional watering is usually not needed after fall seeding.



Seed Mix & Bloom Range

Scientific Name	Common Name	Bloom Season				
<i>Early Season</i>		May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
		-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
*Balsamorhiza sagittata	Arrowleaf Balsamroot	█	█	█		
Linum lewisii	Lewis Flax	█	█	█	█	█
*Asclepias speciosa	Showy Milkweed	█	█	█	█	█
<i>Mid Season</i>						
*Achillea millefolium	Western Yarrow		█	█	█	
*Ratibida columnifera	Prairie Coneflower			█	█	
Gaillardia aristata	Blanketflower			█	█	
<i>Late Season</i>						
Monarda fistulosa	Wild Bergamot (Prairie Beebalm)			█	█	█
Helianthus maximiliani	Maximilian Sunflower			█	█	█
*Cleome serrulata	Rocky Mountain Beeplant			█	█	█
Symphotrichum laeve	Smooth Blue Aster				█	█

*requires **cold stratification**: needs to experience winter, or a period of cold, moist conditions, to germinate.

Arrowleaf Balsamroot



Balsamorhiza sagittata

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 1-3' H x 1-2' W

Bloom Time: May - July

Sun: Full/Partial

Soil: Moist-Moderate

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Arrowleaf balsamroot has an impressive taproot that can reach up to 8 feet deep, helping it survive drought and even regenerate after fires.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

Other Observations

Your observations matter! They help us understand which species establish most successfully in Lake County and help improve future seed mixes.

Lewis Flax

Linum lewisii

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 1-3' H x 1-2.5' W

Bloom Time: May - September

Sun: Full

Soil: Dry, sand, loam

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Lewis flax's flowers open in the morning and close again by evening—each bloom lasts just one day, but continues to produce new blooms for about six weeks, giving pollinators a steady food source.



Observations

- Planting Date:
- Leaves Emerge:
- First Bloom:
- Visiting Pollinators:

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Showy Milkweed



Asclepias speciosa

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 2-4' H x 1-1.5 W

Bloom Time: May - September

Sun: Full

Soil: Dry-Moderate, sand, rock, loam

Special Traits: Drought tolerant, attracts hummingbirds

Showy milkweed is an essential plant for monarch butterflies, serving both as a nectar source and the host plant for larvae.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

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Western Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 2-3' H x 2-3' W

Bloom Time: June - August

Sun: Full/Partial

Soil: Dry, gravel

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Western yarrow is a hardy, low-maintenance plant that stays green, tolerates mowing, and has been used for centuries in traditional medicines by cultures across North America, Europe, and Asia.



Observations

- Planting Date:
- Leaves Emerge:
- First Bloom:
- Visiting Pollinators:

Other Observations

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Prairie Coneflower



Ratibida columnifera

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 1-2' H x 1-1.5' W

Bloom Time: July - August

Sun: Full

Soil: Well-drained, sand, loam, clay

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Prairie coneflower has a long history of use by Indigenous communities for teas, remedies, and even natural dyes made from its flowers.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

Other Observations

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Blanketflower

Gaillardia aristata

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 1-2' H x 1-2' W

Bloom Time: July - August

Sun: Full

Soil: Well-drained, sand, loam, gravel

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Blanketflower's red centers and yellow-tipped petals attract many pollinators, and some moth species even camouflage themselves among its blooms.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

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Wild Bergamot (Prairie Beebalm)



Monarda fistulosa

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 2-5' H x 2-3' W

Bloom Time: July - September

Sun: Full/Partial

Soil: Various

Special Traits: Drought tolerant,
attracts hummingbirds

Wild bergamot, a fragrant member of the mint family, blooms later in the season and attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

Other Observations

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Maximilian Sunflower

Helianthus maximiliani

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 3-10' H x 2-4' W

Bloom Time: July - September

Sun: Full

Soil: Moist-Moderate, clay, gravel

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Maximilian sunflower produces seeds enjoyed by people and various wildlife while its tall blooms support many pollinators and birds.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

Other Observations

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Rocky Mountain Beeplant



Cleome serrulata

Life Cycle: Annual

Height/Width: 3–6' H x 1–1.5' W

Bloom Time: July – September

Sun: Full/Partial

Soil: Various

Special Traits: Drought tolerant

Rocky Mountain beeplant is a magnet for pollinators and has also been traditionally used by Indigenous communities of the Southwest to create natural dyes and pottery paint.



Observations

- Planting Date:
- Leaves Emerge:
- First Bloom:
- Visiting Pollinators:

Other Observations

Your observations matter! They help us understand which species establish most successfully in Lake County and help improve future seed mixes.

Smooth Blue Aster

Symphyotrichum laeve

Life Cycle: Perennial

Height/Width: 2-4' H x 1-2' W

Bloom Time: August - October

Sun: Full/Partial

Soil: Dry, sand, loam

Special Traits: Drought tolerant



Smooth blue aster is surprisingly resilient—established plants can handle deer grazing and often come back even stronger the following growing season.



Observations

- Planting Date: _____
- Leaves Emerge: _____
- First Bloom: _____
- Visiting Pollinators: _____

Other Observations

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Recommended Native Shrubs & Grasses



Chokecherry



Rabbitbrush



Prairie Junegrass

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Chokecherry
<i>Mahonia repens</i>	Creeping Oregon Grape
<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	Serviceberry
<i>Shepherdia argentea</i>	Silver Buffaloberry
<i>Prunus americana</i>	American Plum
<i>Ericameria nauseosa</i>	Rabbitbrush
<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Red-osier Dogwood
<i>Rosa woodsii</i>	Woods Rose
<i>Sambucus caerulea</i>	Blue Elderberry
<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Snowberry
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	Tufted Hairgrass
<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>	Prairie Junegrass
<i>Elymus spicatus</i>	Bluebunch Wheatgrass
<i>Elymus glaucus</i>	Blue Wildrye

These native shrubs and grasses are an excellent choice for creating a resilient and waterwise landscape.

Growing Habitat. Supporting Life. Functioning Beauty.

Rewild Your Yard

***Rewilding isn't about letting your yard go wild.
It's about helping it come back to life, one plant at a time.***

**Season to Season
From Plot to Habitat**



What is it?

Rewilding manages your yard for ecological function instead of appearance.

These vibrant spaces provide food, shelter, nesting sites, and seasonal resources for pollinators and wildlife.

Why it Matters

- Native plants support far more insects than ornamental species.
- Small yards collectively create meaningful habitat corridors.
- Every planting, even a small corner of your yard, increases biodiversity in our community.

Simple Steps

- Convert one corner of your lawn from turf
- Replace a non-native shrub in your landscape with a native species
- Install a shallow water source with stones for pollinator access

*Your pollinator plot is the beginning. **Rewilding happens when you start thinking about full life cycles** — overwintering insects, connected plantings, seasonal bloom timing, and reducing disturbance.*



Ready for a deeper dig?

Visit Missoula Co. Dept. of Extension & Ecology for guidance on **turf removal**, native **bee identification**, and more **re-wilding strategies** you can adopt.

Visiting Pollinators

track your visitors here:



Western
Bumble Bee



Longhorned
Beetle



Sweat
Bee



Painted Lady
Butterfly

***Need help identifying pollinators and
what's in your backyard?***

iNaturalist helps you identify plants and animals around you while generating data for science and conservation.

***The Conservation District encourages the use of this
non-profit, citizen science tool.***

Scan the QR code to sign up, visit [inaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org), or download the "iNaturalist" App



 iNaturalist

How to Create Habitat for Stem-Nesting Bees

Spring

Cut back dead flower stalks leaving stem stubble of varying height, 8 to 24 inches, to provide nest cavities

Old stem stubble will naturally decompose



Female bees find cut or naturally occurring open stems, start a nest, then lay an egg on the pollen balls. Larvae eat the pollen



The following spring... Adult bees emerge and start nests in newly cut dead stems or in naturally-occurring open stems

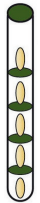


Summer

New growth of the perennial hides the stem stubble

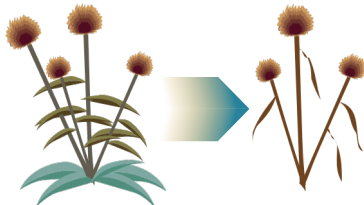


Bee larvae develop in cut dead stems during the growing season



Fall through Winter

Leave dead flower stalks intact over the winter

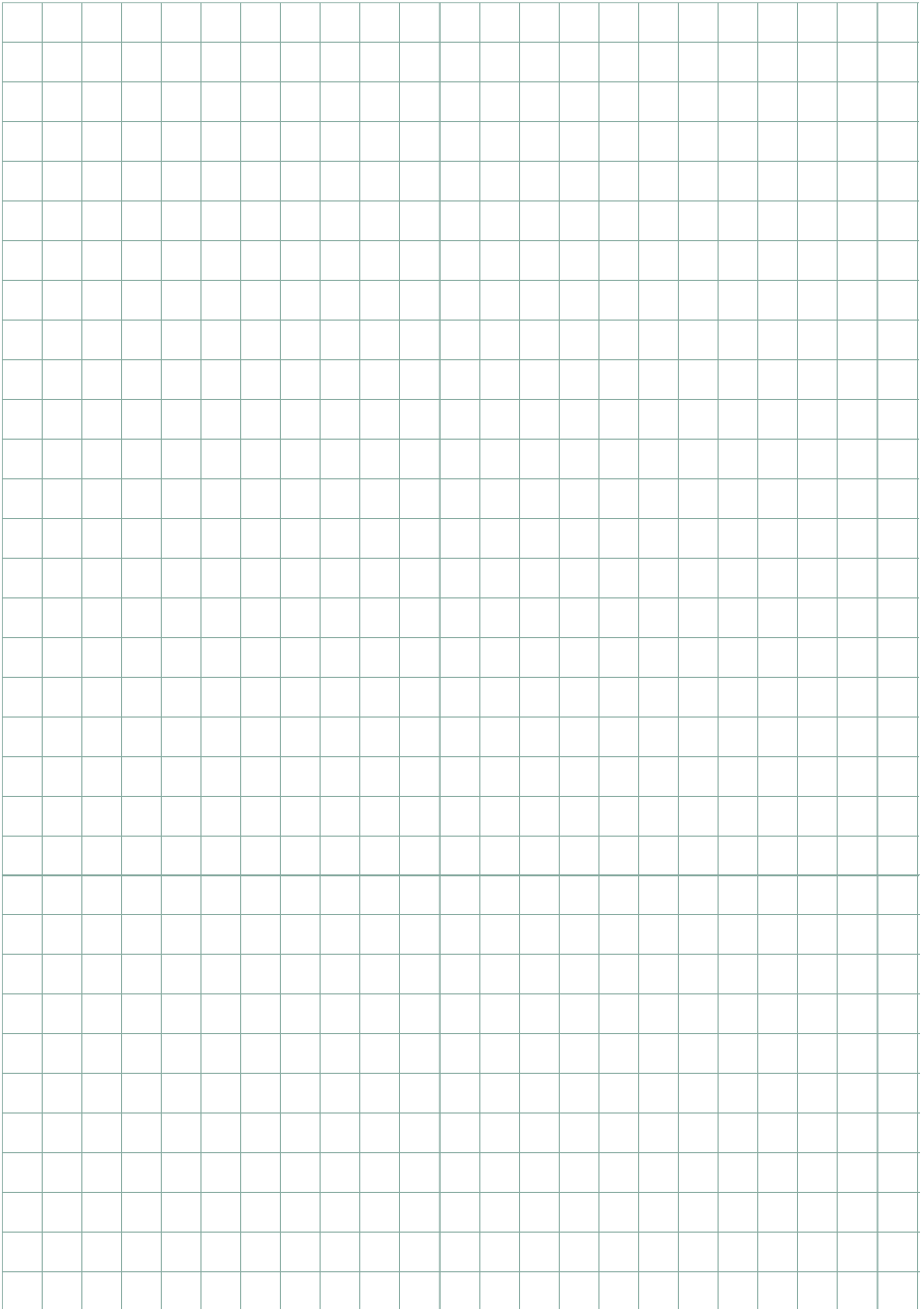


Bees hibernate in stems during the winter



Plot Your Garden

Use this grid to sketch the layout of your yard and pollinator garden



Acknowledgments

This guide was made possible through the generous professional contributions of many individuals and organizations dedicated to native plants and pollinator conservation.

Introduction Photos:

- Center for Native Plants: photo 1 (Beebalm), photo 3 (Beeplant), photo 5 (Blanketflower).
- RKD Peterson: Photo 4 (Bee).

Blooming Photos:

- Lake County Conservation District: Blanketflower, Lewis Flax, Rocky Mountain Beeplant.
- DNRC State Nursery: Western Yarrow, Smooth Blue Aster.
- Center for Native Plants: Prairie Beebalm, Arrowleaf Balsamroot.
- Pipilo Native Plants, Elliot Conrad: Showy Milkweed, Maximilian Sunflower.

Sprout Photos:

- Applewood Seed Company, www.applewoodseed.com: Arrowleaf Balsamroot, Lewis Flax, Western Yarrow, Showy Milkweed, Prairie Beebalm, Blanketflower, Maximilian Sunflower, Smooth Blue Aster.
- Native Ideals, Rebecca Shoemaker: Rocky Mountain Beeplant.

Seed Photos:

- Lake County Conservation District.

Shrub Photos:

- Center for Native Plants: Chokecherry, Rabbitbrush, Prairie Junegrass.

Insect Photos:

- Robert Peterson. Montana State University, Yellowstone Insects – www.montana.edu/yellowstoneinsects/hymenoptera/index.html.

Bloom Range Resource:

- Based on data from Center For Native Plants bloom ranges.

Rewild Your Yard Resource:

- Missoula County Department of Ecology & Extension.

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This guidebook was developed by the Lake County Conservation District Pollinator Initiative with support from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Conservation districts and community programs are welcome to adapt this guide to support local pollinator habitat efforts.



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