



A bee finds welcome nourishment on an Erica blossom. Plan your garden to help pollinators during bleak weather. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY LOTUSBLÜTE17



A bee pollinates a yellow Oregon grape flower. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY F42PIX

# Winter Blooms Give Bees What They Need

Bees and other pollinators out and about during the dark days of winter look to gardeners for the nourishment that keeps them going until the more abundant seasons of the year arrive.

“Black-tailed bumblebees are out as early as January,” says Andony Melathopoulos, a bee specialist with Oregon State University Extension Service. “Native bees are just starting and will be seen more often later in February when the wild willow starts blooming.”

Though there are winter-flowering plants growing in the wild, many pollinators don’t live anywhere near them. That makes using cultivated winter bloomers an important consideration when planning a garden.

“Even a small amount of habitat will sustain bees, even rare species,” Andony says. “These are tiny creatures. Well-thought-out landscapes can provide all the food they need in winter. Gardeners

can really help with that.”

Not many plants flower in winter, but what’s out there adds much-needed brightness to the garden and sustenance for pollinators. Andony suggests the following winter-blooming plants:

- **Brassicas (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, mustard).** If left to bloom into winter—which they will—brassica crops will attract a bevy of bees.
- **Hazelnut (Corylus).** Members of the *Corylus* genus—including the popular contorted and weeping hazelnuts—are one of earliest sources of pollen for bees.
- **Oregon grape (Mahonia).** No garden—or bee—should be without one of these evergreen shrubs. But an even better reason are the insanely yellow flowers that last for weeks.
- **Heath and heather (Erica and Calluna).** Bees zoom to heaths and heathers like they’re approaching a runway. In shades from purple to copper to gold,

these low-growing plants make a mat of color throughout the year, including winter.

- **Winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflora*).** Although it doesn’t have the fragrance of other jasmines, this vining shrub has bright yellow flowers that are a welcome sight in winter.
- **Burkwood viburnum (*Viburnum x burkwoodii*).** The burkwood viburnum is best known for the clusters of fragrant white blooms that bees find irresistible.
- **Sweet box (*Sarcococcus confusa*).** It’s not the inconspicuous wispy white flowers that draw attention in deepest winter, it’s the waft of fragrance that attracts both people and bees.
- **Witch hazel (*Hamamelis*).** Bees get fired up over witch hazel with its crepe-paper-like flowers in orange, red and, most famously, yellow. ■



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