

## Beneficial Insects

### *What are they and why do we monitor them?*

By Pam McFarland and Pam Wolfe



You've found insects in your garden – OH MY! Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Well, it depends. Most insects in your garden are beneficial and are essential for plant health and pest control. But others can damage crops and ornamental plants. Striking the balance by promoting beneficials and controlling pests will result in a more productive and healthier garden.

### **Why are beneficial insects important?**

Beneficial insects include pollinators such as bees and butterflies, insect predators such as lady beetles and lacewings, parasitoids such as certain wasps and decomposers such as beetles. They help maintain healthy ecosystems by pollinating plants, controlling pests and improving soil fertility, thereby ensuring a biodiverse ecosystem that requires fewer pesticides. (See "[Backyard Beneficial Insects in New Mexico](#)," NMSU Guide H-172.)



### **Why is beneficial insect monitoring important?**

Monitoring tracks changes in insect populations over time. It typically involves recording the number of insects in several categories in a predetermined space over a specified time. BIM is especially useful in measuring the impacts of modifications to the habitat. If done before implementing a change, this method creates a baseline of the insect population for comparison.



Subsequent periodic monitoring through the

Top to bottom: Leaf beetle on globemallow and crab spider on Santa Fe phlox (photos courtesy Pam McFarland) and wool carder bee nectaring on *Gaillardia* sp. (photo courtesy Pam Wolfe)

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## Our Mission

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners (the SFEMG) is a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to learning, teaching and promoting locally sustainable gardening through practical, research-based knowledge and programs.

[sfemg.org](http://sfemg.org)



**BE BOLD.** Shape the Future.<sup>®</sup>  
College of Agricultural, Consumer  
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Extension Master Gardener

The SFEMG is one of more than a dozen county-based master gardener programs run under the auspices of New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service in the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences. It is overseen locally by a volunteer board of directors under the direction of the county extension agent.

[mastergardeners.nmsu.edu](http://mastergardeners.nmsu.edu)

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### Learning Resources Available from NMSU

NMSU's [Innovative Media Research and Extension](#) studio translates university-based research into high-quality educational media tools, such as games, apps, virtual labs, animations and videos. The program is offered through the Cooperative Extension Service.

Products focused on food safety, agriculture, health and family, and K-12 and college audiences can be accessed via the studio's website. Among the offerings:

["Selected Plants of Navajo Rangelands"](#) with Navajo names

["Water in Soils"](#) Matric Potential

["Nitrogen & Agriculture"](#)

["Desert Blooms"](#)

["Virtual Insect Collective Lab"](#) (interactive lab)

["Water Sampling"](#) (interactive lab)

["Crazy About Corn"](#) (games, songs and activities for children)

growing season can help gardeners and farmers make informed decisions to limit damage to plants and reduce reliance on pesticides. (See "[Beneficial Insect Scouting Guide](#)," Xerces Society.)

**How have we put BIM into practice?** In 2021 members of the Santa Fe Native Plant Project (SNaPP) – an SFEMG project that promotes the use of native plants in the local landscape – designed and created three demonstration gardens at the Santa Fe County Extension Office, at the Santa Fe County Fairgrounds, 3229 Rodeo Road:

- Native grasslands restoration on the west side
- Pollinator garden on the east side
- Southwest courtyard garden in front of the office

The plants selected for these gardens are primarily native plants identified by researchers at NMSU as being most attractive to beneficial insects. (See "[Perennial Plants for Pollinators in New Mexico](#)," NMSU Guide H-182.)

SNaPP volunteers began monitoring beneficial insects in 2020 to establish a baseline prior to the development of these demonstration gardens. We follow the protocol established in 2018 by Dr. Ashley Bennett, former Integrated Pest Management specialist at NMSU's Los Lunas Agricultural Science Center. Volunteers collect data twice a month, May through September. As part of this monitoring, the team records which flowers are blooming at the time of the monitoring.

**What have we learned?** Four years of data show that native bees as a percentage of total bees observed have gradually increased from 60 percent in 2020 to 90 percent in 2023. While we still see European honeybees in the gardens, we believe that as our native perennials became more abundant the habitats became more attractive to native bees as well as other beneficial insects. Bumble bees and smaller native bees are currently the dominant bee visitors in our gardens.

Another observation is that the total number of insects counted dropped from 656 in 2022 to 428 in 2023. A possible factor is summer precipitation in Santa Fe. The [National Centers for Environmental Information](#) recorded 9 inches of rain from June to August 2022 and only 3 inches in the same months of 2023, resulting in fewer summer flowers and less pollen and nectar that many beneficial insects rely on.

**How can BIM assist the home gardener?** Visit your garden regularly as an observer. At least once a week, have a cup of coffee with your favorite flowering plants and their insect visitors. Sit quietly and watch as insects sip nectar, collect pollen, or feast on insect pests. Stroll through the garden turning over leaves to see what's on the underside. Lacewing eggs? Syrphid fly larvae? The longer you look, the more you will observe. Take photos or make notes that will help you identify the visitors. Are they beneficial?

You might also see insect pests such as scale or aphids being devoured by beneficial insects. At the very least, you could catch a problem early enough to control it without resorting to pesticides. You may also notice that the beneficial insects in your garden prefer a particular plant. Perhaps you'll want to plant more of this to attract these beneficials.

Ah, the rewards of sharing your morning coffee with our beneficial insects ...



## **A Message from SFEMG Board President Anne Rivas**

Gardening is a feast for the senses. I love the smell outside my house – the warm scent of juniper and piñon in the summer sun. I've always loved the smell of warm dirt. Sometimes I can smell the snow melting: a humid, clean smell. I'm eagerly sniffing for the scent of spring dirt – moist, cold, with a faint hint of mold.

I hear more birds now but see mostly robins. I've heard flickers for the last month or so, and the ravens are becoming more vocal. I've heard a bird song lately that I haven't been able to identify. I look forward to the first hummingbirds, and the buzzing of insects in another couple of months. The cool air, the smell of melting snow and warming dirt, an occasional bird song, all say spring is here. The combination of warm sun, the smell of juniper and the buzz of insects says summer.

I want to do more than walk the dog and shovel snow. I want to feel the exertion in my arms of trimming lower branches from the trees – a job I can do while it's still cold. I want to feel the brittle dry stems of plants that need to be trimmed. These must be done early in the spring in my area, to help fire-proof my home. I will leave the stems in a sunny, sheltered area for insects to emerge. I want to feel my toes get cold inside my boots even as I take my jacket off due to the intensity of the sun as I work.

I want to look at plants up close again instead of from inside my windows. I want to see if there are cracked branches due to heavy snow. I want to see if there are any seeds left in dried seed heads, for flower or leaf buds beginning to swell. I want to look for piñon needle scale (*Matsucoccus acalyptus*) and juniper mistletoe (*Phoradendron juniperinum*). I want to pull weeds up by the roots. I want to feel cold, moist dirt in my hands. I want to see bright colors in my garden again, and I will plant for color and scent this year.

How do you experience your garden? Do you plant for fragrance? Do you plant to attract birds? Have you been out in your garden yet, or like me, do you have to wait another week or two?





## **Seed Time! The Santa Fe Seed Library Reopens March 9**

### **By Susie Sonflieth**

Have you been longing to get outside and begin your summer garden? Santa Fe has a short growing season so it is too early to plant your favorite tomato or those beautiful annuals but you can select seeds.

Saturday, March 9, marks the reopening of the Santa Fe Seed Library at the Santa Fe Public Library's Southside Branch located at 6599 Jaguar Drive. The Seed Library, operated by the SFEMG's Seed Steward project, houses thousands of open-pollinated vegetable, herb and flower seeds. The seeds are donated by local growers and commercial seed companies. Patrons may "check out" up to five packets at no cost. A library card is not required to use the Seed Library.

The Seed Library will be open during the library's regular open hours: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday, Friday and Saturday.

To help patrons make selections and learn about growing and saving seeds, the Seed Stewards along with other Extension Master Gardeners will staff an information table at the Seed Library from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays through the end of June. Patrons also will be offered resources on how to harvest seeds and learn how saving those seeds for planting the following years will result in locally adapted, climate change resilient varieties of their very own. Patrons are encouraged (but not required) to return a portion of their seed harvest to help increase the Seed Library's locally grown offerings. There is a seed donation box located at the Seed Library area throughout the year.

The SFEMG Seed Stewards will offer classes on seed planting, harvesting and saving during the season. Look for publicity about these classes through the SFEMG, Santa Fe Public Library and Santa Fe County Extension media outlets. Information will also be available at the Seed Library about these upcoming events.

To help stock the Seed Library, two Seed Packing sessions have been scheduled at the Southside Library Café meeting room. The dates are 5:30-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 13, and 5:30-7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 10,. The public is encouraged to come and help at these sessions.

Since its launch in 2019, the Santa Fe Seed Library has distributed nearly 21,000 free seed packets throughout Santa Fe County. In January 2020 the *Santa Fe Reporter* named it one of their "Twenty-five Favorite Things We Love about Santa Fe," and in January 2024 it was mentioned as one of the reasons the Southside Library made the list.

The Santa Fe Seed Library is grateful for the continuing support and partnership with the Santa Fe Public Library.



## **Locoweed (*Oxytropis lambertii*)**

**By Sally Roberts**



**Courtesy of Joseph A. Marcus, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center**

*Oxytropis*, commonly called crazyweed or locoweed, is a perennial wildflower that is a good addition to a garden or naturalized areas. It grows wild in the prairie and high plains from Canada to Texas and in similar areas in New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado and Kansas. Its unfortunate common names come from the fact that it contains an alkaloid that is extremely poisonous to horses and other livestock. Poisonous species of vetch (*Astragalus*) are also referred to as crazyweed or locoweed.

*Oxytropis* is in the pea family (Fabaceae), and the usual purple one we have around Santa Fe is *Oxytropis lambertii* var. *bigelovii*. The plants hybridize readily with *Oxytropis sericea* when the two species grow in proximity. A striking perennial, it has clustered pea-like flowers on spikes about 12 inches tall and attractive bean-like seed pods, emerging from a basal rosette of gray-green leaves. This lovely wildflower blooms March through May. If bright purple is your color, this definitely is a plant to have in your garden.

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**Landscape Use:** *Oxytropis* can be used in informal gardens and borders or naturalized. It mixes well with other plants of similar light and moisture needs, and its early blooms are attractive to native bees, honeybees and other beneficial insects. The only caution is to make sure not to plant it where livestock may be present.

**Planting and care:** Prefers well-drained sandy or gravelly soil and needs very low water once established. Nitrogen fixation is low. It does best in full sun but will take some shade.

**Propagation:** Best propagated from seed, soaked overnight in water and planted in spring. While *Oxytropis* can spread by short rhizomes into colonies, it is generally not invasive.

**Plant type:** Herbaceous perennial

**Bloom time:** Early spring to summer

**Size:** One foot tall to indefinite spread, usually 1 to 2 feet

**Sun:** Full to partial sun

**Soil:** Well-drained sandy or gravelly soil; high tolerance for high calcium carbonate content

**Water:** Low once the plant is established

**USDA Zones:** 3-8

#### References:

[Plants of Texas Rangelands](#), Texas A&M AgriLIFE Extension Service

*Flora Neomexicana III: An Illustrated Identification Manual*, 2nd ed. Kelly W. Allred, Eugene M. Jercinovic. Illustrated by Robert DeWitt Ivey. LuLu, 2020

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, [PLANTS Database](#)

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, [Plant Database](#)

**"Every gardener knows that under the cloak of winter lies a miracle ... a seed waiting to sprout, a bulb opening to the light, a bud straining to unfurl. And the anticipation nurtures our dream."**

– Barbara Winkler, American author and former executive editor, *Family Circle* magazine





## Calendar of Educational Events

*All classes shown here are open to the public. A \$ indicates there is a cost to attend.*

*Master Gardeners are required to complete 10 hours of Continuing Education between Jan. 1 and Nov. 30 to maintain their Extension Master Gardener status. Be sure to post your hours in [Track It Forward](#) as soon as possible after completing an event so you don't forget as the year progresses.*

*The CE credit requirement does not apply to interns.*

### [New Mexico Native Plant Society | Santa Fe Chapter](#)

6:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 12

["Wildflowers of the Railyard Park"](#)

with Izzy Barr, executive director of the Railyard Park Conservancy

Free / 1 CE

Save the date!

Thursday, July 25 - Sunday, July 28 in Taos

[New Mexico Native Plant Society 2024 Annual Conference](#)



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### [NMSU Ready, Set, GROW! Webinar Series](#)

NMSU's Cooperative Extension Service offers this free gardening series online at 3 p.m. the third Wednesday of each month.

Past presentations are recorded and available on demand. (1 CE per class)

8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Friday, March 15

["2024 Annual Fruit Growers Workshop"](#) in Alcalde

\$ / pre-registration ends March 8 / 1 CE per hour of participation

### [Santa Fe Botanical Garden](#)

1-3 p.m. Saturday, March 16

["Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop"](#) with SFBG Director of Horticulture Linda Churchill

\$ / registration required / 2 CE

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### **Santa Fe Cactus & Succulent Club**

6 p.m. Tuesday, March 19  
Christ Lutheran Church, 1701 Arroyo Chamiso, Santa Fe.  
Free / 1 CE

Save the date!  
Friday, July 26 - Sunday, July 28 in Taos  
"18<sup>th</sup> Biennial Mid-States Conference" in Santa Fe  
Watch <http://www.santafecactusclub.org/> for more details

### **Santa Fe Community College Continuing Education**

7-9 p.m. Tuesday, March 5  
"[Right Plant, Right Place](#)" with Bob Pennington  
\$ / registration required / 2 CE

9 a.m.-noon Saturday, March 9  
"[Regenerative Water Strategies](#)" with Amanda Bramble  
\$ / registration required / 3 CE

7-9 p.m. Tuesday, March 12  
"[Garden Superstars](#)" with Bob Pennington  
\$ / registration required / 2 CE

### **Santa Fe Watershed Association**

10 a.m.-noon Saturday, March 16  
"[Elm Thinning workshop and Clean Up](#)" with Aaron Kauffman  
Free / registration required / 2 CE

### **Smithsonian "Let's Talk African American Gardens!" Series**

10 a.m. Thursday, March 7  
"[Reconnect to Nature](#)" webinar  
Free / registration required / 1 CE

To watch past webinars, visit the [Let's Talk Gardens! Video Library](#)  
(1 CE per hour of video watched)

### **The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation**

11 a.m.-noon Thursday, March 28  
"[In the Life of the Bumble Bee Queen \(and the Cuckoo\)](#)" webinar  
Free / registration required / 1 CE



## SANTA FE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mark your calendars for **“Natural New Mexico,”** a series of programs presented by the Santa Fe Public Library that will explore the unique natural heritage of New Mexico and promote conservation efforts in the region. The programs are free to the public and will be held Saturdays at the Southside Branch Library, 6599 Jaguar Drive. For more details, visit the library's website or call 505-955-2820. No registration required.

**Master gardeners and interns will earn one continuing education (1 CE) credit for each program attended.**

### **“Spring Fever: Planning Your Pollinator Garden”** **2-3 p.m. Saturday, March 9 (1 CE)**

Did you know that New Mexico has 1,000 species of native bees? Learn about the role native pollinator insects play in our ecosystem and how to support them by using host plants in your garden. Find out how to get a free native plant kit for planting a pollinator garden and get tips on garden maintenance for insect conservation. Plus: What's happening with Monarch butterflies? Presenter Kaitlin Haase is the Southwest pollinator conservation specialist with the Xerces Society.

### **“Conservation in Santa Fe County Open Spaces”** **4-5 p.m. Saturday, March 16 (1 CE)**

Learn about some of the natural resource management activities happening in Santa Fe County wild spaces! Some of the county's open spaces are undeveloped wild areas that provide important habitat and migration corridors for pollinators and wild animals. Hear about fire mitigation, the positive impact beavers have had in increasing our water supply, the initial results of county erosion mitigation measures and other restoration activities happening in Santa Fe County.

### **“Water Wisdom for Santa Fe”** **2-3:30 p.m. Saturday, March 30 (1 CE)**

Explore community resilience in hotter, drier times, and how each of us can conserve our precious water resources. We will learn about the beauty and magic of rain gardens and the problems they can solve. We will also get an overview of our local watershed. Native seeds, rebates and lots of planting resources will be available! Presenters:

- Morika Hensley, executive director, Santa Fe Watershed Association
- Christine Chavez, water conservation manager, city of Santa Fe
- Reese Baker, owner and founder of The RainCatcher Inc.



**Santa Fe**  
**WATERSHED**  
**ASSOCIATION**

### **Call for volunteers!**

Join Santa Fe students on a field trip to the Upper Watershed. The field trip is part of My Water, My Watershed, an experiential science-based program for fifth graders that promotes the study and exploration of the Santa Fe watershed, and discovery of the complex relationships between living things and their environment. [Click here for more information.](#)

## New & Noteworthy

*Have you recently read a gardening-related article or book, visited a horticultural website or blog, listened to a podcast, or seen a nature show or documentary you think other gardeners would enjoy or find useful? Send a link to the newsletter ([news.sfemg@gmail.com](mailto:news.sfemg@gmail.com)) and we'll try to include the information in the next issue. Note that some of these sources may have paywalls or advertisements.*

["Master Gardeners: Some Gardening Tips as We Wait for Spring"](#) by Laurie McGrath, *Santa Fe New Mexican* (Feb. 4)

["For a Ukrainian gardener, flowers offer a way forward"](#) by Margaret Roach, *The New York Times* (Feb. 24)

["How to prune clematis – an expert guide, with tips on tools, timings and more"](#) by Holly Crossley, *women&home* (Feb. 24)

["When and how to prune a trumpet vine to keep these vigorous climbers under control"](#) by Drew Swainston, *Homes&Gardens* (Feb. 24)

["Ask the Expert: 'It Is No Longer Gardening as Usual,' Says Kim Stoddart on Growing Food in a Time of Uncertain Climate"](#) by Laura Fenton, *Gardenista* (Feb. 23)

["Funds Awarded to 26 Urban Agriculture Projects Led by Public Gardens and Community Partners"](#) by Devin Dotson, United State Botanic Garden press release (Feb. 22)

["How \(and why\) to peacefully coexist with squirrels"](#) by Kate Morgan, *The Washington Post* (Feb. 21)

["The crime-fighting botanist who uses plants to solve murders"](#) by *Gardens Illustrated* Team (Feb. 20)

["Missouri scientist is the world's top female botanist for naming new plants"](#) by Danny Wicentowski, St. Louis Public Radio (Feb. 18)

["The garden trends to know for 2024"](#) by Clare Foster, *House&Garden* (Feb. 16)

["Funds to Preserve Global Plant Diversity Awarded to Five Botanic Gardens"](#) by Devin Dotson, United States Botanic Garden press release (Feb. 15)

["Car Fumes, Weeds Pose Double Whammy for Fire-Loving Native Plants"](#) by Grace Fruto and Trina Kleist, UC Davis press release (Feb. 15)

["NMSU receives \\$1.2 million award for climate change research collaboration"](#) by Elizabeth McCall NMSU news release (Feb. 13)

["8 Favorites: Gardening Podcasts \(2024 Edition\)"](#) by Laura Fenton, *Gardenista* (Feb. 13)

["Staff Spotlight: Tammy Parsons,"](#) assistant director of nursery research at the [John T. Harrington Forestry Center](#) at Mora, NMSU news release (Feb. 6)

["Axiom New Gardener Study Reveals What's Important to New Gardeners in 2024,"](#) *Business Wire* (Feb. 1)

["2024 Trends in Garden Design"](#) by Rebecca Sweet, *Garden Design*



10 to 10:30 a.m. Saturdays on KSFR 101.1 FM | Streaming live at [ksfr.org](https://ksfr.org)

## **MARCH 2: Slow Food Santa Fe Outloud Edition**

Slow Food Santa Fe's Lissa Johnson and Nina Rosenberg talk with Taylor Hood Farms' Shahid Mustafa about impacts of shrinking water supplies on farming in New Mexico.

## **MARCH 9: The SFEMG Edition**

Host Alexa Bradford talks with Terry Sullivan, New Mexico state director for The Nature Conservancy, about the Conservancy's initiatives throughout New Mexico and the Santa Fe Canyon Preserve.

## **MARCH 16: Food, Farms and Friends Edition**

Pull up a chair for "A Seat at The Table" with Carrie Core and Shahid Mustafa on Food Farms and Friends airing on the third Saturday of each month. Guests are invited to share how their work is helping to create a paradigm shift on how we relate to the land and to each other.

## **MARCH 23: The Santa Fe County Extension Office Edition**

Extension Office Director Tom Dominguez joins host Alexa Bradford to talk about updates and information on current and upcoming events at the Santa Fe Cooperative Extension Service campus, including Family Consumer Science, Agriculture & Natural Resources, and 4-H Youth activities. See more at: <https://santafeextension.nmsu.edu/index.html>

## **March 30: The Giant Veggie Gardener Edition**

Host Chris Salem talks with Jannine Cabossel, "The Tomato Lady," about what to do in your vegetable garden in April. See Jannine's blog at [Giant Veggie Gardener](#).

You can find past episodes of *The Garden Journal* [here](#).

Email: [gardenjournal@ksfr.org](mailto:gardenjournal@ksfr.org)



## **Ask a Master Gardener**

If you have gardening questions, the SFEMG can help.

Pose your questions online [here](#).

We'll do some research and get back to you.