

Flowers

Flowers that provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies and other insects can easily be incorporated into formal borders, planters and hanging baskets. Native wildflowers can be incorporated into planting schemes.

These native flowers are those that originated growing wild in the UK. Many garden plants originally came from other countries these are often termed exotic, non-native or introduced. Other garden plants are the result of hybridisation. They have been cultivated to produce specific characteristics such as showy flowers, in the process the ability to produce nectar or pollen may have been reduced or stopped completely.

Careful choice of the flowers for planting schemes can ensure that wildlife has access to food for as much of the year as possible.

Non-native flowers

EARLY SPRING

- **Snowdrop** nectar for bees emerging from hibernation.
- **Crocus** nectar and pollen for bees.
- **Lungwort** (*Pulmonaria*) an early source of nectar and pollen.
- **Winter jasmine (and jasmine)** An excellent nectar source.

SPRING

- **Grape hyacinth** attracts butterflies and bees.
- **Flowering onions** (*Allium*) for butterflies, bees and other insects.

SUMMER

- **Sunflowers** fantastic for insects and will provide seeds for birds in the autumn .
- **Verbena bonariensis** insect attracting flowers.
- **Honesty** good for insects, food plant for orange tip butterfly, sparrows like the seeds in autumn.
- **Red hot pokers** attracts blue tits and sparrows to get at nectar and looking for insects.
- **Lavender** for bees and other insects, goldfinches will eat the seeds. Trim the bushes in early spring after the frosts but before main growth starts.
- **Marjoram (or oregano) , chives, thyme.**
- **Privet, tobacco plant, evening primrose, red valerian, sweet rocket, jasmine, night-scented stock** are particularly attractive to moths.
- **Buddleja davidii** the ultimate attraction for butterflies.
- **Aster** easily accessible nectar and pollen for insects.

LATE SUMMER / AUTUMN

- **Phacelia tanacetifolia** loved by bees and hoverflies.

Native wildflowers

SPRING

- **Cowslip** Can hybridise with primroses and primulas to form “false oxlips”, which are often a cheery orange! Do well in a mini meadow. Will grow bigger in a border.
- **Primrose** See above. They enjoy dappled shade/ deciduous woodland conditions.

- **Bluebell** Use English bluebells but related Spanish bluebells will hybridise with them. If they are happy they will soon spread!
- **Violet** Sweet violets look daintier than dog violets. They can get everywhere, especially on gravel paths.
- **Celandine** Pretty, buttercup-yellow flowers which are useful for early bees. Will grow in quite shady conditions. They can be invasive but are so small, they don't cause trouble and are easy to weed out.
- **Cuckoo flower/Lady's smock** (*Cardamine pratensis*) Will seed around the place if it's happy (it prefers moist soil). Food plant for orange tip butterfly and green veined white.
- **White dead-nettle** The pied shieldbug likes these and they are very useful for bees. Will spread, you might prefer a cultivated variety. Cut back after flowering.
- **Foxglove** Will grow in sun or partial shade. Bees love it. It will seed about the place.
- **Cow parsley/Queen Anne's Lace** Invasive and takes up space, insects like the flowers. Cut off seed heads if you don't want it to spread. There is a pink form which is said to be less rampant.

SPRING/SUMMER

- **Red (pink) campion** Will spread widely but easy to pull out.
- **Field scabious** Light blue/mauve flowers. Will hold itself well in a border or in a meadow.

SUMMER

- **Devil's-bit scabious** Dark mauve/blue flower heads. Butterflies love it. It has tall wiry stems. Food plant for marsh fritillary
- **Toadflax** (*Linaria vulgaris*) A small yellow “antirrhinum” flower stem, will seed into gravel or rockeries. Bees love it. The tall purple toadflax is also good .
- **Bird's-foot trefoil** (*Lotus corniculatus*) A low growing member of the pea family, it will grow in meadows or borders. Food plant of the common blue and dingy skipper butterflies.
- **Teasel** Bees love the flowers and goldfinches love the seeds. Beautiful, architectural plant, looks good in a border, but it takes up space and seeds freely.
- **Valerian** (*Valeriana officinalis*) Perennial. Tall, stately plant with masses of dainty white (sometimes with a pink flush) scented flowers. Loves damp situations. Food plant of the dingy skipper.
- **Viper's-bugloss** Spires of beautiful blue flowers with red stamens. Prickly/hairy foliage. Loves dry, sunny situations. Bees and butterflies love the flowers. Will spread if happy.
- **Meadow cranesbill** Blue saucer-shaped flowers in a clump. Bees love it.
- **Hemp agrimony** for butterflies but produces lots of seeds and will spread.
- **Honeysuckle and crab apple** are particularly attractive to moths.
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LATE SUMMER / AUTUMN

- **Ivy** a valuable late source of nectar and berries.

Guidelines for planting flowers

- Grow a mixture of native and non-native plants to provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies and other insects.
- Choose plants that flower at different times of the year to ensure that pollen and nectar are available over a longer period.
- Use plants with single flowers ie a single whorl of petals. Old fashioned varieties tend to be more nectar rich, whilst double flowers and new hybrids have very little or are inaccessible to pollinating insects.
- Delay cutting back perennials until the spring as the seed heads that remain provide valuable food for birds and other animals through the winter, while the stems and foliage provide valuable shelter for hibernating insects.
- Where possible, use mulches to control weeds, select disease resistant varieties of plants and use wildlife friendly control if you have to combat pests.
- Use peat-free composts which don't destroy important habitats to create them.
- Encourage a natural balance to develop by having as wide a range of plants and animals as possible.
- On the village green, road verges etc, find out what's there first. Don't destroy important habitats!

Other things to try:

In the lawn

Native wildflowers in a lawn add interest, colour and nectar for insects. A mix of selfheal (low, purple flowers), white clover, black medic (small yellow flowers), speedwell (small bright blue flowers) and daisies, provide a tapestry of colour set amongst the grass. Moss is also useful for bird nesting material and a habitat in its own right. The medic and clover are also food plants for the common blue butterfly. Plug plants can be inserted into a lawn to give an instant effect or seed can be sown over bare patches of soil. Mow only a little less to provide the human inhabitants with a lawn which can continue to be used rather than a meadow.

On bare ground

Sow an annual cornfield seed mix on a patch of bare ground. These flowers were once weeds of arable crops, and it is possible to buy mixes with name such as "Farmers Nightmare". These colourful annuals include poppy, corn marigold, corncockle, scarlet pimpernel, chamomile and cornflower. All are happy to grow in fertile soils. The plants should be cut back and dug into the ground (cultivated) each year, to encourage germination and prevent perennials from establishing themselves. If you leave cultivation until the winter, after the plants have set seed, your cornflower patch should blossom year after year.

On a roof

The implementation of a green roof (one that has been intentionally covered in vegetation) is another way to create a welcoming environment for pollinators and local wildlife, such as birds. Green roofs not only encourage wildlife visitors, they can also be used to blend flat roofs on sheds, porches, outhouses, balconies, garages and small extensions into their surrounding environments, and reduce water run-off going into the drains.

Never dig up wildflowers from the wild. Taking seeds can also be illegal, especially if it is a rare plant—always get the landowner's permission first.

Find out more...

Flora Locale promote good practice in the use and sourcing of British wildflowers. Aimed at landscaping projects, it's a very interesting website. www.floralocale.org

Naturescape is a wildflower nursery just over the Nottinghamshire border and has a useful website and demonstration gardens. www.naturescape.co.uk
Maple Farm, Coach Gap Lane, Langar, Notts 01949 860592

Wildflower seeds are also available from **Growing Wild**, The Dutch Barn, Sibsey Road, Boston, PE21 9QR tel: 01205 359935 or email growingwild@postmaster.co.uk and **Emorsgate Seeds** tel: 01553 829028, website: <http://wildseed.co.uk>

The **RHS** has produced a list of plants 'Perfect for Pollinators' (www.rhs.org.uk/Gardening/Sustainable-gardening/Plants-for-pollinators) and have worked with the **Wildlife Trusts** on the **Wild About Gardens** project. www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk

For information about **Green Roofs**: www.livingroofs.org

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