

Bumblebees and wildflowers need each other to survive



Bumblebee and wildflower populations in the UK have been declining over the past 80 years. This pattern is not a coincidence - the survival of one species is very closely linked to the survival of the other.

Bumblebees feed on pollen and nectar from flowers, making them an important species for plant pollination. In the early 20th century, Britain had thousands of acres of beautiful wildflower meadows. These meadows had a wide diversity of flowers of different colours and shapes. This was great for bumblebees.

Unfortunately changes in the way we manage our land to grow food resulted in the destruction of most of our meadows. This has caused problems for a lot of our wildlife, including bumblebee colonies. Action is needed now to return land to wildflower meadows and to provide food for bumblebees in our gardens.

Create your own wildflower bumblebee haven

Help to save wildflowers and bumblebees by turning all, or part, of your garden into a wildflower bumblebee haven. There are two ways to do this:



1. Convert a grassy area.

To start, make sure that the grass is low in nutrients - stop using fertilisers and weed killers and mow the grass regularly, removing all the clippings.

In the spring plant some wildflower seed in small pots. By the autumn these should have grown to small plants and be ready to plant in the grass.

To do this, use a trowel to make holes about 15cm deep and 5cm wide in the grass. Put a handful of compost in the hole and then plant your wildflower plant. Repeat this for all the plants and then water thoroughly.

Allow the grass to grow around the flowers over the following year. Cut the grass at the end of the summer after most of the wildflowers have had the chance to set seed.

2. Plant seeds in bare soil.

Like method 1, ensure that your soil is low in nutrients. To do this, remove the top 5-10cm of the soil from your chosen area.

Buy wildflower seeds or plug plants from a local supplier. Make sure that the flowers in the mix are native to the UK.

If you are using plug plants, dig holes about 15cm deep and 5cm wide in the soil. Put a handful of compost in the hole and then plant your wildflower plant. Repeat this for all the plants and then water thoroughly.

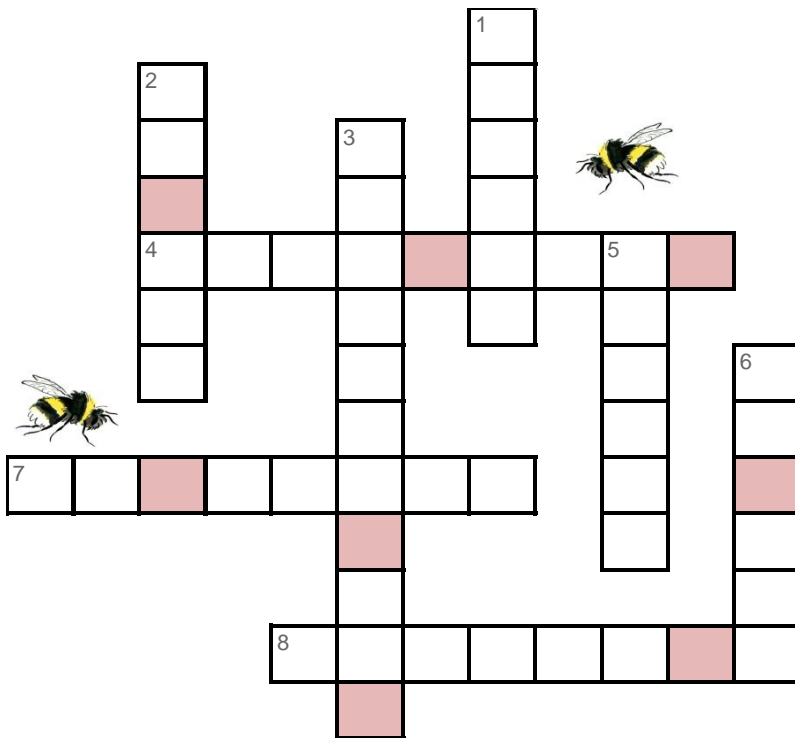
If using seeds, follow the planting instructions on the seed packet.

Cut the flowers at the end of summer after most of the wildflowers have had the chance to set seed.

Crossword

Use your knowledge and the information overleaf to complete the crossword. Then rearrange the letters in the coloured squares to complete this sentence:

Britain's bumblebees are _____.



Down

1. Bumblebee family group.
2. An area of grassland.
3. The process of transferring pollen in the reproduction of plants.
5. The sugary drink that gives bees energy.
6. A colour popular with bumblebees.

Across

4. Bumblebee populations have been doing this due to habitat loss.
7. A herb used in cooking that is popular with bumblebees.
8. A purple-pink tube like flower that is popular with bumblebees.

Snap-shot game

Visit your wildflower bumblebee haven with a friend. Agree who will play the role of photographer and who will play the camera.

1. The camera must close his/ her eyes.
2. The photographer then moves the camera into a position where there is an interesting picture, taps the camera on the shoulder once to indicate that the eyes should be opened and then a second time (3-5 seconds later) to indicate that the camera should shut his/ her eyes.
3. Repeat this three or four times, creating a different photograph each time. Then swap roles.
4. Develop one of the pictures that you took by drawing or painting the image.

Tip: Try to be imaginative and creative when framing your shot – use distance and different angles. You could even take one shot of a bee-friendly area and another of an area with no flowers. Which would you prefer?



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