



Bumblebees nests

Have you ever seen a large, noisy bumblebee zigzagging over the ground in spring? If so it may have been a queen bee looking for a suitable nesting spot.

Bumblebees will look for a site that is sheltered and ideally near a good source of pollen and nectar. Species vary in their choice of location, location, location, however! For example, Buff-tailed bumblebees like to nest underground, often using old mouse or vole burrows, whilst some species, for example the Early bumblebee, sometimes nest on the soil surface in tussocky grass. Carder bees use their legs to comb or card moss and grass to cover their nest whilst Tree bumblebees may choose an old bird box or roof space, mimicking their natural tendency to nest in trees. Bumblebee nests are a rather haphazard collection of roughly spherical wax cells and vary in size between species but never reach more than a few hundred bees.



Photo credit: Clare Flynn

An Early bumblebee queen exploring the ground for a nest site

Did you know?

Bumblebees don't swarm.

Sometimes males of the Tree bumblebee will wait outside a nest for the queen to emerge – this is called a 'drone cloud' and is harmless as male bees don't sting!



Home help for bees

To try and increase the number of natural nest sites in your garden or on your land, leave...

- Compost heaps undisturbed.
- Corners or margins of tussocky grass.
- Piles of leaf litter in a shady spot.
- Hedgebanks untrimmed to encourage small mammals to create burrows.
- Old nest boxes with some nesting material in – if the birds don't use it, the bees might!



Bumblebee nests

If you are lucky to find a nest in your garden it will only last a few weeks.



Caution: Enjoy watching it from a sensible distance. Bumblebees are not aggressive unless provoked or the nest is disturbed.

A Tree bumblebee nest in old fleece in a garden shed

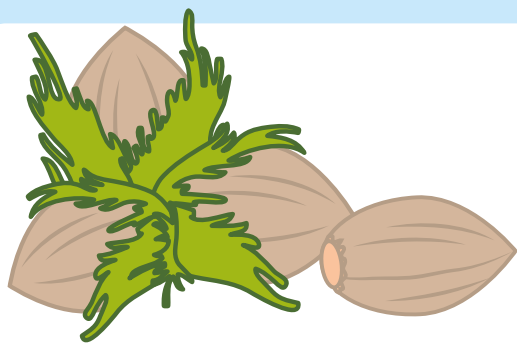


Photo credit: Clare Flynn



For lots more information on bumblebee nests, visit bumblebeeconservation.org





Plant an edible hedge!

A hedgerow provides food and nest sites for a multitude of wildlife, including bees! Choosing plants carefully can provide food for humans too. Try hazel (cobnuts), elder (flowers and berries), blackthorn (sloes), dog-rose (hips) damson and crab apple. There are numerous online suppliers of 'Edible Hedge' packs.

To grow:

1. Plant October to March when trees are dormant.
2. Prepare ground in advance by digging and removing weeds.
3. You may want to plant through a weed blanket.
4. Plant bareroot plants approx. 30cm apart.

Enjoy your harvest in a year or two's time!



Caution: Ensure children understand that some berries are poisonous! Care is needed when harvesting a hedgerow!

Make elderflower cordial

Elder will flower May to June. You will need: about 20 Elderflower heads, 2kg of sugar, 2 lemons and 85g of citric acid powder (from chemist).

1. Shake flower heads outside to **remove insects** etc! Slice lemons.
2. Boil 2.5L of water in a large pan with sugar until dissolved. When cool add flower heads, lemon and citric acid. Cover with a tea towel and **leave for 24 hours** or so.
3. Filter mixture through a colander lined with a tea towel or muslin into another pan. **Discard all the solids.**
4. Boil liquid for a few minutes. Allow to cool and funnel into **sterilised bottles.**
5. Will keep for at least **6 weeks unopened.**



Photo credit: Clare Flynn

Mix with water to enjoy!

Hedgerow jelly

Fruits can be harvested and frozen until ready to use.

You will need: any combination of fruits & hips (make sure they are 'safe' eating berries!), 2-3 chopped up apples, preserving sugar.

1. In a large pan simmer all fruit with a small amount of water until mostly juice.
2. Strain through muslin **overnight.**
3. Measure juice and add 1kg sugar to each litre of juice.
4. Boil until setting point reached. (Usually about 15mins – test a drop on a cold saucer to see if it sets).
5. Decant into **sterilised jars.**

Enjoy on toast!



All activities should be carried out with standard **Health and Safety and Risk Assessment** procedures. Children should not carry out any of these activities without responsible adult supervision and some activities using tools may be unsuitable for younger children.

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