Gardening for bumblebees

A guide to what to grow to help feed bumblebees

www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Saving the sound of summer
Bumblebees are hard-working, loveable creatures, but their populations are experiencing great declines.

Changes in agricultural techniques have meant that there are far fewer wildflowers in the landscape than there used to be, meaning that many of our bumblebee species are struggling to survive. As bumblebees can only feed from flowers, some species have entirely disappeared from much of the countryside.

The good news is that gardens have been acting as a haven for bumblebees for many years. Some species are now more common in urban and suburban gardens than they are in the wider countryside.

Follow our guide to planting and your garden will be buzzing with bumblebees!

Spring

The bumblebee lifecycle begins in spring, when the queen emerges from hibernation. She will have spent the winter hibernating on her own in the soil, so her first task is to feed on nectar-rich flowers to rebuild her energy stores. When she has fed, the queen will search for a nest.

The queen then gathers yet more nectar, as well as pollen, from flowers. She stores the nectar in little wax pots inside the nest, and lays her eggs nearby. The queen lies on top of these eggs, and shivers to keep them warm. This first batch of eggs will all hatch into female workers.

This period of food collection is essential for the nest – if the queen doesn’t establish a successful nest at this stage, the nest and queen could die. Making sure that you have plants in flower in early spring is essential to help feed starving queens and growing nests.

Early Summer

In early summer, the nest will begin to grow larger.

Some of the workers will collect more food for the nest, while others will tend the nest and the next batch of workers that the queen has laid.

The young worker bees will require a lot of food to help them survive and grow, meaning much more nectar and pollen is needed from flowers.

Ensuring your garden is filled with flowers at this stage, means that the young worker bees get a good start in life.
Late Summer

In late summer, the nests of most species begin to produce males and new queens. Until this stage, the queen won’t have laid any eggs that hatch into males. As their only role is to mate with the new queens from other nests, the males leave the nest and cannot return. Their days and nights are spent outdoors, mostly clinging to flowers or ‘cruising’ hedgerows, looking for queens with which to mate.

Producing new queens and males takes a lot of energy, and nests can only do it when they reach a large size, with a good store of food. If a nest doesn’t produce males or new queens, it has ultimately failed. It is crucial that the nest has a good supply of food from flowers to feed the new queens and males, so try to make sure you have a good variety right up until the autumn.

How Bee kind is your garden?

Find out how bee-friendly your garden is by using our Bee kind app. Select the flowers that you have in your garden to calculate your score and then receive a tailored list of 10 more flowers to add to help the bees even more. Visit beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org

Spring flowers
- Flowering currant
- Lungwort
- California lilac
- Comfrey
- Pussy willow
- Bluebell
- Bugle
- Mahonia
- Pieris
- Crocus
- Dicentra

Early Summer flowers
- Allium
- Borage
- Catmint
- Cranesbill
- Poppy
- Sweet pea
- Viburnum
- Aquilegia
- Campanula
- Cotoneaster
- Globe thistle
- Snapdragon
- Thyme
- Foxglove

Late Summer flowers
- Buddleia
- Cosmos
- Honeysuckle
- Lupin
- Nasturtium
- Verbena
- Cornflower
- Echinacea
- Lavender
- Marjoram
- Sedum

Summer flowers
What you can do to help

British gardens cover more than 1 million acres and can be a lifeline for bumblebees. No matter what size your garden is, you can contribute to our efforts to save the sound of summer by providing lots of bee-friendly flowers. By bee-friendly, we mean flowers that are rich in pollen and nectar.

Many ornamental plants that are commonly found in British gardens, such as pansies and begonias, are of no value to wildlife. Years of cultivation for showy blooms mean that these colourful flowers often produce little pollen or nectar.

There are hundreds of beautiful flowers that do offer these rewards though, including foxgloves, lavender, alliums, herbs and wild roses that you can add to your collection.

You can also help by supporting our work, including volunteering, fundraising and becoming a member of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. For more information on all of the above, including access to our Bee kind gardening tool, visit bumblebeeconservation.org

Join us today!

Support our conservation work safeguarding the future of these vital pollinators. You will receive a membership pack full of bumblebee information and our members magazine three times a year. Visit: www.bumblebeeconservation.org for our range of memberships & prices.

Educational factsheet 4


Photo credit: Delma Moore, Paul Benson, Les Moore.

Improve your Bee ID skills with a new app. Search Bee ID in the App Store.

Follow us on:  

April 2018. BBCT044. Copyright 2018 ©. All rights reserved. Printed by Greenhouse Graphics on recycled paper.