

Bee the Change for businesses: helping bumblebees through your workplace





What's good for bumblebees is good for business!

We can all do our bit to Bee the Change for the UK's struggling bumblebees, including businesses. By helping to build a brighter future for bumblebees, you can also support your organisation's sustainability and corporate social responsibility goals, boost health and wellbeing among your co-workers, and build positive relationships in your local area.

This guide will help you understand why bumblebees are important and need our support, and choose the actions which are right for you.

Front cover image © Cletwr Gardening Group



**For more simple ways to help bumblebees and free resources, visit
bumblebeeconservation.org/beethechange**

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Why do bumblebees need your help?

Bumblebees are large, furry, and charismatic four-winged insects. They are well-known for their meandering, 'bumbling' flight, and their distinctive buzz – which is where their Latin name *Bombus* (meaning 'booming') originates. They are lovable and iconic insects in our landscape.

In the last century, UK bumblebee numbers have crashed. Large-scale changes to our landscape mean that millions of the flowers that bumblebees feed on have vanished. Good nesting spots are now in much shorter supply too, leaving them homeless as well as hungry.

Bumblebees are **key pollinators** of a huge variety of wildflowers, and many of the fruit and vegetable crops we eat. This makes their decline a very serious problem for both the environment and our food security. Saving bumblebees is not only important for the sake of these amazing insects, but also for people and our planet! Let's help save the sound of summer together

What is 'pollination'?

Pollination is the process by which plants reproduce. When a plant is fertilised with pollen, it produces seeds from which new plants will grow.

Pollinators such as bumblebees and other insects help move pollen from one flower to another.



Bumblebees and honeybees: what's the difference?



If you'd like to 'save the bees', the best thing you can do is support **wild bees such as bumblebees** (not honeybees). **Here's why...**

Bumblebees are wild and don't live in hives

Bumblebees are **wild bees**, which means that, every spring, each queen emerges from six months of hibernation and has to find a safe, sheltered nest site to start a colony as a lone parent. Typical nest sites include long, tangled grass, underground in abandoned mouse and vole holes, or up high in rot-holes in trees.

The queen is on her own for the first month, feeding and tending to her offspring – it's a tough existence and many queens don't survive.

Two bumblebee species were driven to extinction in the UK in the 20th century, and a further seven species of our remaining 24 are under severe threat.



Bumblebees have more 'pollination power'!

The 24 species of bumblebee in the UK have a range of different tongue lengths: some longer, some shorter. This means that, as a group, they feed on and help pollinate a wide variety of different flowers, from flat, open blooms like cornflowers to deeper, tube-shaped flowers like foxgloves. Bumblebees are the only insect pollinators in the UK able to 'buzz pollinate'. This gives them special abilities to pollinate particular fruits and vegetables such as blueberries, tomatoes, sweet peppers, chillies, and potatoes.

Honeybees in the UK are nearly all kept by beekeepers, living in hives and provided with top-up food and medication when required. The one species of honeybee in the UK has a short tongue, so they visit and pollinate a much more limited range of flowers than bumblebees.

They are also very efficient at collecting pollen, which means that they're not actually very good at pollination on a per-bee level – bumblebees are much better at spreading the pollen around!



Bumblebee numbers have fallen while honeybees have increased



The honeybee, however, is not endangered as a species: globally, managed hives have increased 60% since the 1950s, and in the UK, colony numbers have recently increased back up to a level comparable with the 1950s.

While habitat loss is the biggest factor in bumblebees' decline, in some places they are also facing increasing competition for food (pollen and nectar from flowers) from domesticated honeybees as more people take up beekeeping.



Should you get a honeybee hive?

While beekeeping is an enjoyable hobby, putting a honeybee hive on your site will not help the wild bees which are struggling to survive (bumblebees and solitary bees). Having a honeybee hive doesn't contribute to biodiversity or support Environmental Sustainability Goals.

The best thing you can do for wild bees is provide more bee-friendly flowers and nesting spots, to help increase their numbers!

Research also shows that beekeeping can have negative consequences for wild bees by increasing competition for flowers and by passing on diseases.



© Isabel Fry



Make your outdoor space more bumblebee-friendly



1

Before you start... protect the habitat you have

One of the easiest ways to support bumblebees is by identifying and looking after areas which are already providing the flowers and potential nesting sites they need. Then you can look at where else you can make improvements.

Key things to protect:

- Look for existing flowering plants which bumblebees are visiting, and when they flower
- Flowering trees and hedges, including flowers at the base of hedges
- Flowers in lawns/grass – including dandelions but there are plenty of others too!
- Potential nesting sites: long, tangled grass, woodland edge, under hedgerows, and other dense vegetation.



2

Let some grass grow so wildflowers can bloom!

Mowing grass too short too often stops native low-growing wildflowers like dandelions, clovers, and vetches from flowering. These humble flowers, often dismissed as 'weeds', are absolutely vital for bumblebees.

Encourage your landscape contractor to take part in Plantlife's '**No Mow May**' movement, or reduce the mowing regime to once every six weeks from April. Make sure cuttings are removed rather than being mulched back in. (When cuttings rot down, they act as fertiliser and help the grass grow bigger and faster, meaning you need to mow more frequently and making it harder for many wildflowers, which tend to prefer nutrient-poor soil, to thrive.)



3

Use flower power

Bumblebees need a **constant supply of pollen and nectar-rich flowers between March and October** (nesting season). When you see a bumblebee flying around and visiting flowers, it's only ever **40 minutes from starvation!**

You can help by planting up a '**bumblebee garden**': this could be a flower bed if you have the space, some containers by the front of your office or carpark, or even a couple of window boxes!

If you have a landscape contractor, talk to them about the benefits of bee-friendly gardening.



Take a look at our examples of good and bad flowers for bumblebees on the next pages



4

Make your outdoor space more bumblebee-friendly



4

Give bumblebees a home

Bumblebees are wild bees, meaning they need to find safe, sheltered places to **nest and hibernate**. (They don't live in wooden hives like honeybees, or bee 'hotels' with lots of hollow tubes like solitary bees.)

You can create potential bumblebee nest sites by being less tidy! Long, tangled grass will provide opportunities for species which nest on the ground surface. Many bumblebees also nest underground in abandoned mouse and vole holes, and queens will search for these in wilder, undisturbed corners.



5

Go pesticide free

Pesticides can harm bumblebees directly by affecting their ability to find food and reproduce. Some are lethal. Indirectly, they also remove valuable wildflowers such as dandelions from the landscape, reducing the amount of food available.

Some added ingredients in herbicides have been found to be more lethal to bumblebees than insecticides.

You can create a safer environment for bumblebees by:

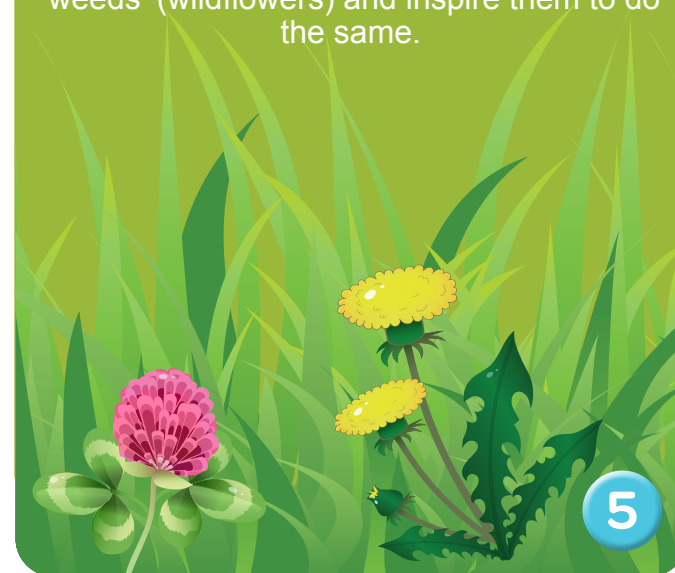
- Buying organic, pesticide-free plants, bulbs and seeds
- Stopping chemical spraying (herbicides as well as insecticides)
- Where vegetation control is taking place, look for alternative means of control. For example, pulling up or burning off 'weeds' (if you really need to get rid of them at all).



Bee the Change bonus

Encourage your staff to garden and spend time in nature. It's great for people's mental health and wellbeing.

Put up a sign to tell people that you're letting the grass grow to help bumblebees. You might help change attitudes towards 'weeds' (wildflowers) and inspire them to do the same.





Good plants for bumblebees



Look for:

- 'Open' flowers where the pollen and nectar is visible in the centre
- Composite flowers, which contain lots of tiny flowers (florets) packed closely together to form the flower head
- Deeper, tube-shaped flowers which are good for long-tongued bumblebee species
- At a garden centre, look for the flowers that the bees are visiting!



Crocus



Allium



Field scabious



Foxglove



Salvia



Nasturtium



Coneflower



Bad plants for bumblebees



Avoid:

- Flowers with lots of densely packed petals such as double-flowered cultivars, make it impossible for bumblebees to access the pollen and nectar
- Traditional 'bedding plants', which generally have little to no pollen or nectar.



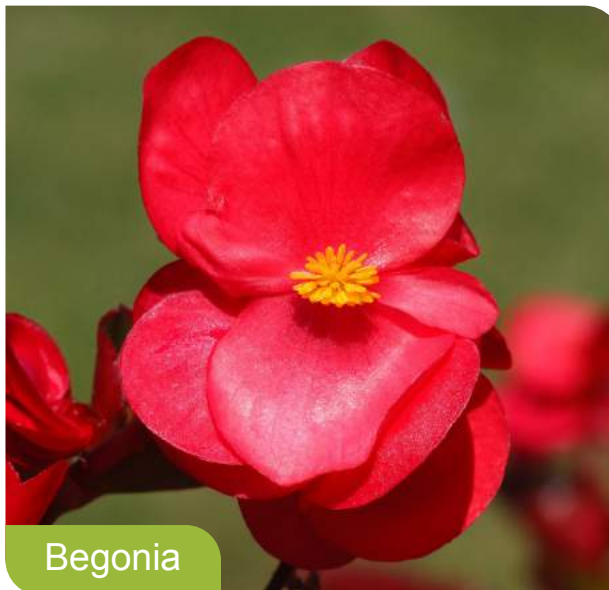
Pompom dahlia



Geranium (*Pelargonium*)



Hybrid tea rose



Begonia



Petunia



Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Get your staff buzzing and help our charity do more for bumblebees!

Your support matters

Bee Supportive – support the conservation of all bumblebees, rare or common

Bee Aware – raise awareness and increase understanding about bumblebees and the social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits which they and other pollinators provide

For more simple ways to help bumblebees and free resources, visit bumblebeeconservation.org/beethechange



The Bumblebee Conservation Trust exists solely thanks to the generosity of others. Help us continue our vital work creating and restoring bumblebee habitats around the UK, promoting bee-friendly gardening, and raising awareness about these vital pollinators.



1

Have a 'Bumblebee Bonanza' work event

Encourage staff to choose one action from our Bee the Change resources which they can do, for example planting one bumblebee-friendly flower.

Or here are some ideas for fundraising activities

- Hosting a book, cake or jam sale
- Grow and sell plants that are perfect for bumblebees
- Organise a quiz night
- Get physical with a long walk, bike ride, fun run or even a marathon!
- Donate each month by signing up to a payroll giving scheme.



2

Buy bee-friendly gifts for your colleagues and family

Our online shop has gift membership, ID guides, posters, and a dedicated schools pack aimed at primary level. You will also find our charity clothing range and products from other businesses who support us.



3

Call for bumblebee-friendly road verges

Many grassy verges can provide vital wildflowers for bumblebees, but often these are mown too frequently for anything to bloom.

Contact your local council and ask if they can change the management of road verges near your workplace, if they haven't already adopted a bee-friendly regime. If they aren't sure how to go about it, refer them to us – that's what we are here for!



Bring the buzz to your marketing

1

Featuring bumblebees in your marketing material

If you're on a mission to help bumblebees, you want to make sure you're showing the right kind of bee in any social media posts, webpages or posters you create.

- Bumblebees are fat, round and fuzzy
- Remember to avoid the '3 Hs':
No hives, hexagon shapes, or honey.
These all relate to honeybees, not bumblebees!

Spread the word

Check out our resources you can share including our social media graphics bumblebeeconservation.org/beethechange/resource/share-a-graphic-on-social-media/



2

If you're interested in...

- Making a donation
- Making us your 'Charity of the Year'
- Becoming a Business member
- Cause-related marketing (Commercial Participator Agreements)
- Supporting our school work or projects around the country.

... get in touch with us at fundraising@bumblebeeconservation.org



3

More information

Bee the Change – over 40 FREE resources full of simple ways to help bumblebees
bumblebeeconservation.org/beethechange

Bee kind – interactive 'flower finder' tool to help your garden be all that it can be for bees!
beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org

Land management advice

Our science and conservation specialists offer bespoke advice and support that will help you improve your understanding of bumblebees and how to manage your land for them.

Contact us at: consultancy@bumblebeeconservation.org

