
Gardening for bumblebees



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.

Spring



flowers

Early



summer flowers

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 tool. Bee kind scores the existing plants in your garden to see how bee-friendly it currently is and then provides planting recommendations to improve its bee-friendliness. Visit beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org

Late



summer flowers

What to grow . . .

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
- Vetch
- Globe thistle
- Snapdragon
- Thyme
- Foxglove

Late summer flowers

- Marigold
- Cosmos
- Honeysuckle
- Lupin
- Nasturtium
- Verbena
- Cornflower
- Echinacea
- Lavender
- Marjoram
- Sedum
- Scabious



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 the Change resources, 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.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust is a registered charity (England & Wales 1115634 / Scotland SC042830). Company registration number 05618710 (England & Wales).

www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Photos: Delma Moore, Paul Benson, Les Moore.



Improve your Bee ID skills with our 'What's that bumblebee?' App for the Big 8 - search on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store today!

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