



The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service

A Guide to Bee Friendly Gardens Soroptimist International Bournemouth (SIB)

Introduction

This guide is drawn from a number of sources on the internet (listed at the end of the paper) and was compiled by the Planet Action Group at SIB. We hope that members will find it a useful way to think about their gardens and consider small changes that may help in supporting our dwindling but critical bee population.

Why Bees Are Important

You are probably aware that bees are in trouble, with numbers and species in quite dramatic decline. What you might not be aware of is just how important bees are to us, and the planet in general. Native bees don't just make honey and give us a lovely sound in the garden on summer afternoons. Bees are vital for the pollination of plants, playing a crucial role in helping to provide around a third of the food we eat. No matter how small your garden or outdoor space, you can do your bit to help native bees thrive. They will return the favour by pollinating all your plants.

Did you know there are more than 200 species of bee in the U.K.? Only one of them is a honeybee and just over 20 are bumblebees. The rest are all solitary bees. Regardless of the species, all bees help in the pollination of plants and are crucial to the ecosystem.

The Best Plants for Bees

The best plants for bees are those that provide a good food source of nectar or pollen, or ideally both. Think of the whole garden, and this will really broaden the potential for bee friendly plants. Trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals are all great candidates. You should also aim to grow plenty of plants that produce single, open flowers for bees. These make it easy for bees to reach the pollen and nectar. Apparently bees can see the colour purple the most clearly, so it's a good idea to bear this in mind when choosing your plants. Also plant flowers in blocks of the same species as bees would rather feast on one type of plant rather than a buffet of different blooms.

Herbs are easy to grow and provide a valuable source of food for bees and other pollinating insects. They can be grown easily in borders or pots and have the added benefit of adding fresh, fantastic flavours to our meals. The ten most bee-friendly herbs are wild marjoram, mint, fennel, borage, chives, rosemary, sage, hyssop, lemon balm and thyme.

Various species of native bees are active at different times of the year, so try to grow a range of pollinator-friendly plants that will provide flowers for as long as possible (March to September is the key period). Some examples of flowers by season follow but the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) website has extensive lists of trees, shrubs, climbers and flowers. The RHS provides a bee emblem that garden centres use to identify plants endorsed by them as good for pollinators so look out when shopping.



Spring flowers: Pansies, Crocus, Hyacinths, Primroses, Forget-me-Nots, Bluebells, Pussy Willow, Flowering Cherry Trees, Hawthorn, Peonies, Alliums, Rhododendrons, Lungwort, Hardy Geranium, Honesty.

Summer flowers: Lavender, Phlox, Echinacea, Cosmos, Foxgloves, Snapdragons, Bee Balm, Delphiniums, Honeysuckle, Alliums, Marigolds, Zinnias, Nasturtiums,

Buddleia, Verbena Bonariensis, Sunflowers, Globe Thistles.

Autumn flowers: Zinnias, Asters, Nasturtiums, Sedum, Ivy, Hardy Fuschia, Dahlia, Michaelmas Daisy.

Winter flowers: Snowdrops, Hellebores and Winter Clematis, Honeysuckle, Heather, Crocus, Aconite.

Garden Features

Wildflower patch- This low maintenance option will support many wildlife species not just bees; it makes sense that native plants and wildflowers suit native wildlife. You can buy mixed packets of wildflower seeds which will create a lovely meadow effect that bees will enjoy in any size patch.

Bee hotel- Solitary and mason bees make their homes in little holes so a bee hotel may encourage them to nest in your garden. The hotel should be positioned 1- 4 feet off the ground and facing as close to south as is possible for warmth. Make a wooden box and fill it with hollow stems such as old flower stalks or bamboo canes, dried thoroughly and cut to size. Ideally, holes should vary in diameter between 2mm and 10mm, to attract the widest range of species.

Queen bee nest- In autumn and early winter, bumblebee queens are looking for a warm, dry place to hibernate. If you can provide this, you'll be helping to support next year's bumblebee population. To create a queen bee nest, all you need is a terracotta pot, some moss, and some hay. Place the moss in the bottom of the pot, then fill it loosely with hay. The aim here is for the moss to fall down a bit when you turn the pot over, allowing the bee to enter through the drainage hole in the bottom. Position your filled pot in a sheltered part of the garden. Place it upside down, and use soil to bury it about halfway. This will provide a cosy winter home for your local bumblebee queens.

A source of water- Bees need a water source to keep them hydrated while they work on your flowers. This can be as simple as a shallow dish of water with some stones, twigs or marbles sticking out to provide a landing spot. Make sure you keep an eye on your bee bath in warm weather, and top it up regularly.

Other Tips

Don't be too tidy in the garden- This is a good rule in general when making your garden a home for wildlife. Nature isn't tidy, so wildlife isn't suited to taking up residence amongst a perfectly pristine garden. Try letting some of your lawn grow longer to allow plants like clover and dandelion to flower; it doesn't have to be a huge chunk, even a small patch will make a difference. If you can't bear the thought of an unkempt lawn, you could go easy on the weeds at some spot in the garden. You can also leave dead plant stems on the plant to provide a place for solitary bees to nest instead of, or as well as, making bee hotels. Piles of branches are also great for bee species that nest in wood and stems.

Use natural fertilisers, pesticides and weed control- To provide your local bees with the safest environment, aim to only use natural pesticides, fertilisers and weedkillers. Many chemical-based products are harmful to bees and lots of other beneficial insects too. Your garden is probably already home to a very natural form of pest control: that is the insects that feed on the pests. Ladybirds, ants, spiders and lacewings are brilliant for controlling aphids (greenfly and blackfly), and ground beetles will happily deal with slugs and caterpillars. Encourage the beneficial varieties, and you'll deal with

problem pests while also supporting your local bees. Natural weed control methods include removing by hand, smothering, and filling up your ground with plants to starve out the weeds.

How to help a tired bee- Make a sugar solution by mixing sugar with warm water in equal quantities. Put some of the solution in a small saucer or bottle cap, and position it close to the bee's head. This provides the bee with a high-energy drink which will quickly help to perk it up.

Conclusion

We hope this guide is useful to members in considering changes that could be made to whatever outdoor space is available to attract and support bees. With a basic understanding of planting and maintenance, it's possible to create a haven for wildlife and still have an attractive, appealing garden. You may be able to implement one, several, or all of these suggestions; any action will contribute to supporting these fascinating and vital creatures.

Sources

<https://www.discoverwildlife.com>

<https://www.friendsoftheearth.uk>

<https://www.gardenersworld.com>

<https://www.growingfamily.co.uk>

<https://www.lizearlewellbeing.com>

<https://www.rhs.org.uk>

August 2021