

GARDENING FOR BUMBLEBEES

Information about Bumblebees' way of life gives clues as to what the gardener needs to do:

- Bumblebees need both nectar (as a 'high-octane fuel' for flight) and pollen (as a source of protein) to maintain a successful colony.
- They need a continuous succession of flowers from spring to Autumn, so there is always a food supply.
- They need flowers that are simple in form, rather than highly-hybridised horticultural kinds.
- Most herbs and traditional cottage-garden plants are ideal. Most are perennials.
- Flowers are best planted in large groups or patches ('drifts') of the same kind, so that the bees have good foraging sites. Bumblebees like to stick to one type of flower while foraging, and can waste energy scouting around for more forage.
- A selection of flowers of different shapes (e.g bowl-shaped, bell-shaped, 'lipped' and tubular) will appeal to different species, as they have different tongue lengths.
- If possible, a part of the garden should be left less intensively cultivated and more informal, to allow nesting sites. If your garden is large enough, leave an area of rough tussocky grass.
- Many of the native wild flowers that appeal to bumblebees look good if grown mixed together with herbs or "cottage garden plants" in flower borders.
- Bees can't see the colour red, and many scarlet and orange coloured garden flowers are of little use to them, being bird-pollinated flowers in origin.

What Bumblebees Don't like:

- Insecticides (including organic ones!)
- Most bedding plants (i.e. as sold in polystyrene strips in garden centres and DIY stores): Petunias, Begonias, Busy Lizzies, French Marigolds, Pelargoniums, Pansies, etc, etc.
- 'Double' flowers (i.e. flowers where stamens are replaced by extra rows of petals)
- Other highly-hybridized horticultural novelties.

Flowers from these families particularly appeal to bumblebees:

- Lamiaceae (Oregano, Lavender, Rosemary, Catmints, Deadnettle, etc). – mainly as a source of nectar. *White deadnettle (Lamium album)* is an essential early source of nectar.
- Boraginaceae (Lungwort, Comfrey, Cynoglossum, Cerinthe, etc)
- Scrophulariaceae (Foxgloves, Veronica, Hebe etc)
- Dipsacaceae (Teasels, Scabiouses)
- Asteraceae (Thistle-like flowers, Cardoon, Knapweeds, Asters, Solidago etc)
- Fabaceae (Vetches, Clovers, Broom, Trefoils, Runner Beans etc). – mainly as a source of pollen. *Red Clover (Trifolium pratense)* and *Birds foot Trefoil (Lotus corniculatus)* are important bumblebee flowers.
- Rosaceae (Single- flowered Roses, Brambles, Raspberries)
- Ericaceae (Heathers, Blueberries, Bilberries, Strawberry Tree)

SOME SUGGESTED FLOWERS FOR BUMBLEBEES

SPRING:

White Deadnettle (*Lamium album*)*
Pink Deadnettle (*Lamium maculatum*)
Lungwort (*Pulmonaria* species)
Cowslip (*Primula veris*)*
Dwarf Comfrey (*Symphytum grandiflorum*, or *S.*
'Hidcote Blue')
Dusky Cranesbill (*Geranium phaeum*)
Snakeshead (*Fritillaria meleagris*)*
Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

Winter Honeysuckle (*Lonicera frgrantissima* and *L. x purpusii*)
Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)
Redcurrants, Blackcurrants, Gooseberries*
Willows and Sallows (*Salix*)*
Thymes (*Thymus*)
Perennial Cornflower (*Centaurea montana*)
Winter Heather (*Erica carnea*)
Grape Hyacinths (*Muscari*)
Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*)*

SUMMER:

Brassicas (cabbage etc) left to flower
Broad Beans, Runner Beans
Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea** and other species)
Culinary sage, Meadow Clary (*Salvia pratensis*)*,
and other blue-flowered *Salvias*
Catmint (*Nepeta*: many kinds)
Agastache (most species)
Woundworts and Betony (*Stachys* species)*
Knapweeds (*Centaurea scabiosa*, *C. nigra*)*
Lupins (both herbaceous and shrubby species)
*Origanum vulgare** and other *Origanum* species
Calamintha species*
Speedwells: *Veronica**, *Veronicastrum*, *Hebe*
Sea Hollies (*Eryngium* : all species)
Globe Thistle (*Echinops*: all species)
Other thistle-like plants (*Onopordum**, *Cirsium*, etc)
Myrtle (*Myrtus communis*)
Cranesbills (*Geranium** single-flowered wild species
rather than hybrids)
Comfrey (*Symphytum* species*)
Aquilegia vulgaris (single flowered only)*
Larkspur (*Consolida*: single flowered only)

Delphinium (Single flowered only)
Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*)*
Bird's foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)*
Scabioues (*Knautia**, *Scabiosa**, *Cephalaria*)
Teasels (*Dipsacus fullonum** and other species)
Honeywort (*Cerinthe*)
*Iris pseudacorus** and *I. siberica*,
Lavender (mainly the tall *L.* 'intermedia' forms)
Vetches and Tares (*Vicia cracca**, etc)
Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*)*
Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)*
Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus*: grow in grass)*
Purple Toadflax (*Linaria purpurea*)
Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*)*
Chives* and ornamental garlics (*Allium* species)
Bellflowers (*Campanulas**, wild species rather than
hybrids)
Raspberries* and Brambles* (wild or cultivated)
Specially For long-tongued *Bombus hortorum*:
Monkshoods (*Aconitum* sp.), Nasturtiums – single
flowered strains of *Topaeolum majus*, and Wild
Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*)

LATE SUMMER:

Aster *Novi-angliae* cultivars, and *Aster amellus* and its
cultivars; these Michaelmas Daisies are not invasive.
Buddleja X weyeriana (orange flowers, not invasive)
Some Hardy Fuchsias (forms of *F. magellanica*)
Cornish Heath (*Erica vagans*)*
Sedum 'Matrona'

Succisa pratensis (Devil's Bit Scabious)*
Native Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*)* only -other
kinds of Goldenrod are very invasive
Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*)*
Single- flowered Dahlias
Helianthus x "Lemon Queen" – not invasive
Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*)

SPECIALLY FOR POLLEN

Single-flowered wild and shrub roses,
e.g. *Rosa moyesii*, *Rosa gallica officinalis*, *R.*
'Complicata', *R. virginiana*, *R. canina**, *R.*
*pimpinellifolia**, *R. mollis**, *R.* 'Frances E. Lester';
and many others

Hypericums
Single-flowered poppies (*Papaver rhoeas**, *P.*
somniferum, *Meconopsis cambrica**)
Yellow Broom*, and broom-like plants (*Genista*,
Cytisus, *Dorycnium* etc)

*Plants marked with an asterisk are native British wildflowers.

GENERALLY NOT MUCH GOOD FOR BUMBLEBEES:

Jasmine; Forsythia; Lilies (*Lilium*), Arum Lilies (*Zantedeschia*), *Gladiolus*; Lilac (*Syringa*); Magnolia; Scarlet flowered
Salvias; *Hydrangea*; *Viburnum*; *Lobelia*; *Cannas*; *Crocsmias*; *Kniphophias*, *Phormiums*, Most *Penstemons*, Most *Umbellifers*
(Carrot Family: *Fennel*, *Angelica* etc.); Bearded Irises; *Astilbe*; *Hemerocallis*; *Tulips*; *Alstroemeria*.; *Sunflowers*; *Yuccas*;
Pelargoniums; *Pansies*; *Dianthus* (pinks and Sweet Williams) *Evening Primrose* (*Oenothera*) *Ox-Eye Daisy* and most other
white daisies; *H.T. roses*; Most bedding plants, *Buddleja Davidii*, *Sedum X* 'Herbstfreude'.