

# Herbs for the Wildlife-friendly Garden

## Good Sources of Nectar

Most of the culinary and aromatic herbs that we grow come from the Mediterranean region of Southern Europe, which has a similar insect fauna to ours. Our insects tend to find their flowers very suitable as a source of pollen and nectar.

Lots of herbs belong to the Lamiaceae family (small, lipped flowers such as thymes and mints that are favourites of bumblebees), or the Apiaceae family (umbellifers such as parsley and fennel that are popular with hoverflies).

You should leave dead flowering stems and flower heads in your wildlife-friendly herb garden and cut them back in the spring.

The list below is by no means exhaustive

## Recommended herbs

**Thymes** (*Thymus* spp.) - all kinds popular with bees

**Rosemary** (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) – In my garden the tall, early-flowering 'bog-standard' *R. officinalis* is by far the best, providing early nectar to bumblebees and solitary bees. It has pale blue flowers.

**Culinary Sage** (*Salvia officinalis*) – Again the common culinary sort with plain leaves seems to be the freest flowering and is very popular with long-tongued bumblebees, Many other blue-flowered *Salvias* are good bee plants, but not the red flowered ones.

**Hyssop** (*Hyssopus officinalis*) – Another good bee plant.

**Agastache** – there are lots of *Agastache* species around these days. Many of them, especially *A. foeniculum*, are excellent and will attract a huge range of insects. The scarlet and orange ones are probably not bee plants, although I have never grown them and have no first-hand experience.

**Lavenders** – some are excellent bee plants, mainly the old-fashioned types, and some are also very attractive to butterflies. Modern hybrids, especially of the so-called French Lavender *L. stoechas*, are often not very accessible to insects because the flowers have been modified by hybridisation. Nomenclature is in a muddle, but the old types such as *L. angustifolia* are usually reliable if you are looking for varieties attractive to bees. Your best bet is to find a flowering plant in summer that is popular with bees or butterflies and ask the owner if you can have some cuttings.

**Fennel** – *Foeniculum vulgare*

A perennial umbellifer, bearing flat heads of small yellowish flowers – especially good for hoverflies. The bronze-leaved form is just as good.

**Angelica** – *Angelica archangelica*

Another umbellifer, a tall biennial – the greenish flowers are very attractive to insects.

A number of other herbs and vegetables are umbellifers – parsley, celery, caraway, dill, carrots, parsnip etc. It is worth letting all of these produce a few flowers as they are good for insects.

**Chives** - *Allium schoenoprasum* – a bee plant

**Garlic Chives or Chinese Chives** - *Allium tuberosum* - also attracts butterflies.

Many other species of *Allium* are attractive to bees.

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