

## Gardening for Bumblebees

### Information about Bumblebees' way of life gives clues to the gardener:

- To maintain a successful colony Bumblebees need both nectar (as a fuel for flight) and pollen (as a source of protein)
- They need a continuous succession of flowers from spring to autumn.
- They need flowers that are simple in form, rather than highly-hybridised horticultural kinds.
- Most herbs and traditional cottage-garden plants are ideal. Most of these 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.
- 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 need:

- Insecticides (including organic ones!)
- Bedding plants (i.e. as sold in modules in garden centres and DIY stores): Petunias, Surfinias, Begonias, Busy Lizzies, French Marigolds, Pelargoniums, Pansies, etc, etc.
- 'Double' flowers (i.e. flowers where stamens are replaced by extra rows of petals) and other highly-hybridized horticultural forms.
- Exotic flowers from the southern hemisphere (Cannas, Callistemon, Crinodendron, Agapanthus, Watsonia, Crocosmia, Phormium, Gladiolus etc). A few varieties of these provide forage for a few species of bumblebees, but flowers from the northern hemisphere that are related to our native flora are much more likely to provide suitable forage for bumblebees.

## Flowers from these families particularly appeal to bumblebees:

Lamiaceae (Oregano, Lavender, Rosemary, Catmints, Deadnettle, Agastache 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, Scabiouises)

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*)

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, Betony and Lamb's Ear (*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)  
 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)  
 Monkshood (*Aconitum* species)  
 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 (only 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\* (*Allium schoenoprasum*)  
 Bristol Onion or Round-headed Leek (*Allium sphaerocephalon*)\*  
 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 *Tropaeolum majus*, and Wild  
 Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*)

### **LATE SUMMER:**

*Aster Novae-angliae* cultivars, *A. pyrenaicus*, *A. x frikartii* 'Monch', *A. amellus* and its  
 cultivars; *A. cordifolius* and its cultivars. These Michaelmas Daisies are not invasive.  
*Buddleja X weyeriana* (orange flowers, not invasive)  
 Cornish Heath (*Erica vagans*)\*  
*Sedum* 'Matrona' and some other *Sedums*.  
*Succisa pratensis* (Devil's Bit Scabious)\*  
 Native Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*)\* – the other kinds of Goldenrod are very invasive  
 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'; 'Goldfinch', 'Veilchenblau', 'Kew Rambler' and many others

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 USE FOR BUMBLEBEES:**

Jasmine; Forsythia; Daffodils & Narcissus ; Lilies (*Lilium*), Arum Lilies (*Zantedeschia*), *Gladiolus*; Lilac (*Syringa*); Magnolia; Scarlet flowered Salvias; Hydrangea; Viburnum; Lobelia; Cannas; *Crocasmias*; *Kniphophias*, *Phormiums*, Bearded Irises; *Astilbe*; *Hemerocallis*; Tulips; *Alstroemeria*.; *Yuccas*; *Pelargoniums*; Pansies; *Dianthus* (pinks and Sweet Williams) Evening Primrose (*Oenothera*) H.T. roses; Most bedding plants.

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- Marc Carlton

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