

Gardening for Pollinators



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba
nature.scot

Helping Scotland's pollinators

Scotland's pollinators are a vital part of our biodiversity. Species such as bees, hoverflies, moths and butterflies are a welcome and familiar sight in our gardens, parks and countryside.

We can all contribute something to making Scotland more pollinator-friendly, and for many of us that might simply mean using our garden, balcony or window box to help these important insects.

Plant pollinator friendly plants

There are a host of garden plants to choose from which are colourful, attractive, and can provide pollinators with the food they need.

Hungry pollinators need flowers that produce lots of nectar (for energy) and pollen (for protein). The key period for your garden to be in bloom for pollinators is between March and October.

What plants should you select at the garden centre? The answer is surprisingly simple. Do you see pollinators visiting particular plants? If you are in a garden centre, you can quickly see which flowers bees and butterflies visit most. Also keep an eye out for endorsements such as the Royal Horticultural Society's "Perfect for Pollinators" logo.

As a rule of thumb, go for perennials over annuals: perennial plants are generally better sources of pollen and nectar.



Suggestions for your garden

We have drawn up a short, but by no means exhaustive, list of plants which would entice and reward pollinators in your outdoor space.

	Spring	Summer	Autumn
Ornamental plants and herbs	Bluebell, Bugle, Comfrey, Crocus, Hellebores, Lungwort, Spring-flowering heather	Allium, Aquilegia, Borage, Catmint, Columbine, Cosmos, Delphinium, Foxglove, Globe thistle, Lavender, Lupin, Nasturtium, Oregano, Poppy, Scabious, Snapdragon, Sweet pea, Thyme, Verbena, Viper's bugloss	Aster, Button snakewort, Cornflower, Sedum
Flowering trees and shrubs	Berberis, Broom, Crab apple, Forsythia, Hawthorn, Mahonia, Wild cherry, Rowan, Willow	Buddleia, Bramble, Cotoneaster, Honeysuckle, Laburnum, Rock rose, Viburnum	Hebe, Ivy
Wildflowers in long grass areas	Dandelion, Dead-nettle, Vetches	Bird's foot trefoil, Clovers, Geranium, Knapweed, Ox-eye daisy, Speedwell, Thistle, Vetch, Yarrow	Autumn hawkbit, Clovers, Vetch

Window boxes are very popular as are pots and hanging baskets. Many plants will do well in containers – herbs are very popular for the scent and colour they can provide. Many herbs are widely used in the kitchen, but try to leave some to flower, this will help our pollinators. Amongst the herbs worth considering are Chives, Lavender, Rosemary, Sage and Thyme. Perennials that will work in window boxes include Aubrieta and Trailing Verbena.

The perfect lawn?

Many of us have been brought up to believe that a tidy garden and a well-clipped lawn are part and parcel of efficient gardening. However, if we are to help our pollinators thrive we could usefully challenge some of these practices.

Why not reduce mowing to create an undisturbed wildflower patch, strip or meadow.

Once summer is underway, consider mowing all or part of your lawn on a 6-weekly cycle. This should allow flowers like clover to bloom, providing more food for pollinators

Weeds have had a bad name. But some wild flowers are rich in food for bumblebees and other pollinators despite being labelled as weeds. A good example is the much maligned dandelion. If you can avoid cutting your grass until after the dandelions have flowered but before they set seed, they will provide an important source of food for all types of pollinators.



Shelter and nesting sites

If you have mastered pollinator friendly planting then why not try to provide wild pollinator nesting habitat in addition to food? Bees in particular will welcome your efforts.

Different types of bee need particular sites to nest in.

- **Bumblebee** colonies nest in long grass or in abandoned rodent holes.
- **Solitary bees** nest in two ways: such as holes in stone walls, wood, or in commercially available bee boxes.
- **Mining bees** burrow into bare ground especially on south/east facing earth banks.

Remember wild bees are not aggressive, so it is perfectly safe to have them nesting in your garden.



Encourage friends and family

It is vital that we raise awareness of the importance of pollinators, the role they perform, and the challenges they face. If we do this, then people and organisations will know how to help them. Where better to start than with family, friends and your local community?

More people are starting to understand how important pollinators are and what we can do to help them, but we need to keep spreading the word, especially to the next generation.

If you are actively helping our pollinators you can encourage others by sharing pollinator friendly plants. Plants and seed can be expensive, but for many pollinator friendly species, existing plants can be divided or new plants can be grown from cuttings.

Here are five pollinator friendly plants that can be shared, with a note of how best to share them:

Lavender	Share seed or cuttings
Sage	Divide existing plants
Thyme	Share seed or cuttings
Viper's Bugloss	Sow from seeds
Willow	Share hardwood cuttings

Resources

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust website has a very good page on gardening to help bees www.bumblebeeconservation.org/garden-advice

Why not take their garden test to see how bee-friendly your garden is @ www.beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org

There is an excellent resource on the Buglife website that details how to be a wildlife-friendly gardener @ www.buglife.org.uk/activities-for-you/wildlife-gardening

Read the Pollinator Strategy for Scotland on the Scottish Natural Heritage website @ www.nature.scot/pollinator-strategy-2017-2027

