



National Bee Unit

Helping Bees

January 2022

We are all aware of the declining population of bees not only in the UK but also throughout the World. Bees are a major plant pollinating force and a significant element in our food production, and we can all do something to help them – starting in our own gardens.

What can we do to help?

Planting bee friendly plants is something that can be done by most people even if it is only planting suitable flowers in window boxes and on balconies.

What plants are suitable?

Some suggestions are given on the reverse of this sheet. Broadly speaking, old fashioned and simple flowers rather than multi-floral types are often best. The best places for bees usually have a mixture of flowering plants and trees that, between them, provide bees with pollen and nectar almost all the year round.

What should I do if I see a lethargic bee in my garden or home?

These bees are usually exhausted or starving and feeding them with a solution of pure white cane sugar and water often results in a miracle cure! **Please do not use a honey and water solution** as some honeys can contain harmful pathogens, which are fatal to honey bee brood. These pathogens do not affect humans in any way.

What should I do if they nest in my house or garden?

If possible, leave bumblebee and solitary bee nest sites alone. If you do not disturb them, they will leave you alone. If a swarm of honey bees settles, contact a local beekeeper or the local beekeeping association. They will be happy to offer advice and may collect them, hive them and perhaps get you involved in the craft of beekeeping. If honey bees are in the fabric of your house, you will need expert advice tailored to the circumstances.

I would like a hive of honeybees in my garden. What should I do?

If you do not wish to take up the craft many beekeepers would be delighted to place a hive in a suitable garden. If you wish to take up the craft or just want to see if it would interest you then local beekeeping associations would be happy to help you. Details of where your local association is can be found on the British Beekeepers Association's (BBKA) website: http://www.bbka.org.uk/about/local_associations/find_an_association.php

How can I encourage bumblebees and solitary bees to nest in my garden?

Nest boxes and tubes can be purchased commercially or homemade. Setting up and populating them can be fun but difficult. The bee house is a great way of doing this, especially for attracting solitary bees that will use the holes to over winter their young larvae in. There are many ways to ensure that you will attract bees to the garden and buying a bee house is a great first step. To increase the chances of this happening, hang your bee house in a sheltered place and at least three feet off the ground with the holes (entrances) facing South or East in order to catch the morning sun. When the holes are sealed with mud or leaves then you know you have developing bees in, so it is best to leave them alone.

Growing Suitable Garden Flowers

With changing farming methods, the loss of hedgerows and other bee friendly habitat a large decline in all bee species and numbers has taken place over probably 250 years though it has accelerated since the second World War. There are many ways in which we can encourage wild bees into our gardens or land, the simplest of these being to grow a variety of suitable flowers.

Here are some examples of flower species that are inviting to bees:

- Crocus, *Crocus* spp.
- Comfrey, *Symphytum* spp.
- Yellow archangel, *Galeobdolon luteum*
- White and Red deadnettle, *Lamium* spp.
- Lavenders, *Lavandula* spp.
- Sages, *Salvia* spp.
- Thymes, *Thymus* spp.
- Marjoram, *Origanum vulgare*
- Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officinale*
- Winter honeysuckle, *Lonicera fragrantissima*
- Snowdrop, *Galanthus* spp.
- Lambs Ears, *Stachys lanata*
- Skull Caps, *Scutellaria* spp.
- Bugles, *Ajuga* spp.
- Geraniums, *Geranium* spp.

- Snapdragons, Antirrhinum spp.
- Toadflax, Linaria spp.
- Sweet Peas, Lathyrus spp.
- Foxglove, Digitalis purpurea.
- Mahonia, Mahonia spp.

These fruit, vegetable and other common garden plants are also very inviting:

- Blackberry
- Redcurrant
- Blackcurrant
- Raspberry
- Strawberry
- Apple
- Pear
- Broad bean
- Runner bean
- Pea
- Plum
- Heather
- Ivy
- Borage
- ... and Dandelion!

Meadow type wildflower seed mixes can be very beneficial, depending on the type of mix, and the importance of trees as a food source cannot be over emphasised: willows, in particular represent a very good source of pollen early in the spring.

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