



Plants to attract bees

Lancaster Beekeepers advisory leaflet No 17

Bees visit plants to collect pollen and nectar. Pollen is a powdery substance which forms the bees' basic food. It is essential to the growth of individual bees, reproduction and the development of colonies. Pollen is also important to the functioning of the bees' ability to produce the wax essential for the colony expansion.

Nectar is basically a weak sugar solution with small amounts of organic acids, ethereal oils, polysaccharides and alkaloids. Bees store this, evaporate off the excess water and store it as honey. The honey is then used as food at times when pollen is not available.

In the process of collecting pollen and nectar, bees become covered with the pollen of one plant which then fertilises the next plant of the same species that they visit.

Plants have evolved in such a way that only specific types of bee can pollinate them, and this usually depends on the length of the bee's tongue. So no plant will attract all types of bee.

Not all plants rely on bees for pollination. Grasses, sedges, rushes, nettles, docks and trees rely mainly on wind pollination, although bees will still collect pollen from them.

In general the flowers which use bees for pollination are brightly coloured, often scented and sometimes provide the bees with nectar guides.

To continuously attract a variety of types of bee to your garden, it is necessary to have a range of flowering plants that provide pollen and nectar over most of the year.

The following table provides examples of readily available plants that provide pollen (P) and/or nectar (N). It is by no means an exclusive list!

January

Eranthis (Winter Aconite) (N&P)

Ericas (winter flowering) (N&P)

Galanthus (Snowdrop) (N&P)

Hammamelis (Witch Hazel) (P)

Viola (Pansies) (N)

February

Chionodoxa (N&P)

Corylus (N&P)

Crocus (N&P)

Ericas (winter flowering) (N&P)

Galanthus (Snowdrop) (N&P)

Hammamelis (Witch Hazel) (P)

Helleborus (N&P)

Salix (Willow) (N&P)

Viola (Pansies) (N)

March/April

Anemone blanda (N)
 Arabis (N&P)
 Aubretia (N&P)
 Ericas (winter flowering) (N&P)
 Muscari (Gape Hyacinth) (N&P)

Mahonia (N&P)
 Scilla (N&P)
 Skimmia (N&P)
 Ulex (Gorse) (N&P)

April/May

Berberis (N&P)
 Wallflowers (N&P)
 Doronicum (N&P)
 Lamium (Deadnettle) (N&P)
 Magnolia (P)

Malus (Crab apple) (N&P)
 Prunus (Cherries) (N&P)
 Saxifraga (N&P)
 Syringia (Lilac) (N&P)
 Tulipia (Tulips) (P)

May/June

Marsh marigold (N&P)
 Japonica (N&P)
 Cotoneaster
 Cytisus (Broom) (N&P)
 Daphne (N&P)
 Iberis (Candytuft) (N&P)
 Lamium (Deadnettle) (N&P)
 Laurus nobilis (Bay Laurel) (N)

Lobelia (N)
 Alyssum (N&P)
 Lithodora (N)
 Limnanthes douglassi (N&P)
 Pyracantha (Firethorn) (N&P)
 Sorbus (N&P)
 Weigela (N)

June/July

Buddleia (N)
 Deutzia (P)
 Escallonia (N&P)
 Gentian (N&P)
 Geranium (N&P)
 Geum (N&P)
 Hebe (N&P)
 Helianthemum (N&P)
 Impatiens (Busy Lizzies) (N&P)
 Limnanthes douglassi (N&P)

Linaria (N&P)
 Lithodora (N)
 Lobelia (N)
 Alyssum (N&P)
 Lonicera (Honeysuckle) (N&P)
 Meconopsis (N&P)
 Philadelphus (Mock Orange)
 Rubus (Bramble) (N&P)
 Stranvaesia (N&P)
 Viburnum (N&P)

July/August

Coreopsis (N&P)
 Filipendula (P)
 Fuchsia (N&P)
 Geranium (N&P)
 Geum (N&P)
 Hebe (N&P)
 Hydrangea (N&P)
 Hypericum (P)
 Impatiens (Busy Lizzies) (N&P)

Lavandula (Lavender) (N&P)
 Limnanthes douglassi (N&P)
 Linaria (N&P)
 Malva (N&P)
 Nepeta (Catmint) (N&P)
 Potentill (N&P)
 Sidalcea malvaeflora (N&P)
 Thymus (Time) (N&P)
 Verbascum (N&P)

August/September

Cirsium (thistles) (N&P)	Lysimachia ((N&P)
Echinops (N)	Meconopsis (N&P)
Eryngium (N)	Mentha (Mint) (N)
Eschscholzia (N&P)	Phlox (P)
Gaillardia (N&P)	Stachys (N&P)

September/October

Aster (N&P)	Viola (Pansies) (N)
Kniphofia (N&P)	

October

Hedera (Ivy) (N&P)	Viola (Pansies) (N)
--------------------	---------------------

November/December

Ericas (winter flowering varieties) (N&P)	
Hedera (Ivy) (N&P)	Viola (Pansies) (N)
Hammamelis (Witch Hazel) (P)	

Important Notes

The amounts of pollen and nectar produced by plants vary enormously depending on the prevailing conditions in any season. The plants listed are generally regarded as the most consistent producers of pollen and nectar.

Within each of the plant family listed there are likely to be a diverse range of cultivars. Although these developments might be more attractive in terms of flower and foliage, they are often at the expense of pollen and nectar production. Double flowers, for example, often prevent bees from accessing pollen and nectar. It is advisable to check before buying, that the particular variety is suitable.

The plants listed contain a variety of plants and shrubs, large and small, vigorous and slow growing, annual and perennial, Before planting anything you should check to ensure that the particular plant is appropriate for the size of your garden.

A very useful book for this purpose is *The bee friendly garden – bring bees to your flowers, orchard and vegetable patch* by Ted Hooper & Mike Taylor, ISBN: 1-899296-29-8.

Another is *Plants for Bees* by W D J Kirk & F N Howes ISBN 978-0-86098 271-5