The Pollinator Garden: www.foxleas.com

Create a Garden for Pollinators

A pollinator-friendly garden is a garden that is planted with plenty of flowers that provide nectar or pollen for a wide range of pollinating insects.

The following features will make your pollinator garden effective:

- Include a range of flower types, shapes and sizes
- Plant your flowers in a sunny site
- Create shelter from prevailing cold wind
- Group flowers of the same kind in large drifts
- Plan for a succession of flowers throughout the whole growing season, from early Spring to Autumn
- Minimise or avoid the use of pesticides

More about these Ideas…

A pollinator-friendly garden is a garden that is planted with plenty of flowers that provide nectar or pollen for a range of pollinating insects throughout the year.

A pollinator garden can be any size. You might only have a balcony or a small yard but you can still plant pollinator-friendly flowers there.

You don't have to be exclusive about this planting policy – there may well be other flowers that you like to grow in your garden for various reasons, even though they do little, if anything, to help pollinators. Don't stress about this! Simply aim to include a decent number of pollinator-friendly flowers in your planting scheme throughout the year.

In other parts of the world birds are also pollinators, and on other continents (including north America) many flowers are bird-adapted. (See book reference below). However in Europe most pollination is done by insects, or in some cases the wind.

Include a range of flower types, shapes and sizes.
Many pollinating insects can only exploit particular shapes or sizes of flowers. To support pollinator diversity you must cater for all shapes and sizes of insect mouthparts. Do this by planting a range of flower types.

Plant your pollinator garden in a sunny site.
In our often dull and rainy climate insects need the sun's warmth to help them stay active.

Create shelter from prevailing cold wind.
Use flowering hedges, or hedges of native hedgerow shrubs, or fences clothed in climbing plants. These will create warm 'micro-habitats' within the garden.

Group flowers of the same kind in large drifts.
Many insects prefer particular types or species of flowers. By planting their favourite kinds of flowers together in large groups ('drifts') you make locating and exploiting that resource easier for them.

Plan for a succession of flowers throughout the whole growing season.
The climate of Britain and Ireland means that we have long growing seasons and some types of pollinating insects manage to breed two or more generations. But they need pollen or nectar from early spring until autumn in order to do this successfully.

Minimise or eliminate the use of pesticides.
If insect pests such as aphids become a problem there are well-known organic methods to control them. In a nature-friendly garden such pests are rarely a problem anyway, as they tend to be controlled by birds and other natural predators.

Sources of further information about planning and planting gardens…

Royal Horticultural Society 'Plants for Pollinators' Planting Lists

A good place to start, as many nurseries and garden centres now sell plants that bear this special RHS logo on their labels.

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) states:
'Using scientific evidence, our extensive experience and the records of gardeners and beekeepers, we've selected a range of year-round flowering Plants for Pollinators to tackle the decline in pollinator numbers.'

Their Plants for Pollinators web page has links to downloadable plant lists.

A note of caution: Be aware that a few nurseries and retailers use their own similar-looking 'bee friendly' logos that are not necessarily based on the RHS advice and in some cases are misleading or wrong. Some others still use an out-of-date RHS 'Perfect for Pollinators' logo that was replaced by the RHS '**Plants** for Pollinators' one some years ago. If in doubt refer to the latest planting lists on this RHS web page.

Butterfly Conservation's Gardening for Butterflies and Moths web pages give specific information for gardeners, including separate plant lists for butterflies and moths.

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust provides a Community Planting Guide - a straightforward illustrated list of garden plants suitable for bumblebees.

The Wildlife Trusts: Bees and Pollinators
This section of the Wildlife Trusts' website gives links to action packs, a wild bee ID sheet, case studies, and a list of 5 actions you can do to support pollinators, based on DEFRA's National Pollinator Strategy for England.

The Wildlife Gardening Forum
Not an on-line forum but a charity dedicated to furthering wildlife-friendly gardening. Their extensive website aims to provide a high quality evidence base for wildlife-friendly gardening. The Forum circulates a quarterly e-newsletter to members with the latest wildlife gardening news and science, and runs a popular Facebook group. Their Plants for Pollinators section discusses 'native' vs. 'non-native' plants and has links to several planting lists. (I'm co-author of this section).

For more information about pollinators and help with identification…

Two Important Books

Ollerton, Jeff: Pollinators and Pollination, Nature and Society. Pelagic Publishing 2021.
Very readable work by one of Europe's leading pollination ecologists discussing latest research about pollinators and pollination across the world. Essential reading!

Ollerton, Jeff: Birds and Flowers: an Intimate 50 million year relationship. Pelagic Publishing 2024. A groundbreaking book discussing pollinating birds and bird-pollinated flowers. Again very readable and quite fascinating.

General Help with Identification

iSpot is a friendly and free on-line community that helps to identify wildlife in Britain and Ireland. You can browse the thousands of species spotted so far, or submit your observation, try to identify it, and the community will help you. Has separate on-line communities covering some other parts of the world.

Butterfly and Moth ID

UK Butterflies Provides information on all of the butterfly species found in Britain and Ireland, with ID pages

UK Moths
The defintive on-line identification guide to the moths of Britain and Ireland, with over two thousand species featured and over seven thousand images.

Irish Butterflies
Contains information about the butterfly species found in Ireland, where to see butterflies, information on completing butterfly surveys, and listings of recommended books and links.

Bees (not honey bees)
Steven Falk's British Bees on Flickr site is the comprehensive resource for images and information about wild bees. It can be used in conjunction with his book (see below). It has excellent pictures, background information and links to further useful websites and books about wild bees in Western Europe.

Falk, Steven: Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland. Bloomsbury, 2018. This is the definitive field guide to wild bees, with much supplementary information in the introduction. Essential if you are interested in wild bees.

Bumblebee Conservation Trust
This site includes a straightforward bumblebee identification guide.

Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS)
Through this site you can access distribution maps and images and ID help for each species of wild bee in Britain and Ireland.

Hymettus Ltd
A conservation charity for wild bees, ant and wasps producing useful Information Sheets for gardeners.

Nico's Wild Bees and Wasps images by Nicolas Vereecken

Nurturing Nature George Pilkington's site contains useful articles, information and videos about solitary bees and bee houses: click on the 'articles' menu item and you will find lists of topics down both sides of the page.

Hoverflies (these are also important pollinators!)
Steven Falk's page of hoverfly images has good background information and further links

The Hoverfly Recording Scheme site has species descriptions and distribution maps. (Maps are for GB only).

If you live in Ireland
If you live in Northern Ireland or The Republic of Ireland, the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan website has species lists and ID help, as well as links to data recording schemes for Ireland. Also information and advice for gardeners and growers.