

GARDENING FOR BEES

Some tips and recommended plants



General rules

Try to provide something with nectar and pollen all year round - particularly spring and autumn.
Avoid hybrid or double flowers which are harder for bees to access and can have less pollen and nectar.
Large groups or drifts of the same flower are better than scatterings of different flowers.
Different shaped flowers will attract bees with different length tongues.
If in doubt go for blue and purple flowers - bees' favourite colours. Red is less visible to them.
Do not spray open flowers with pesticides or herbicides. Better still, garden organically.

Below is a tiny selection of recommendations. For over 500 plants for different situations as well as much more about honey bees, bumblebees and solitary bees, please consider reading my book - details at the end.

Spring essentials

Early spring is the toughest time for bees, and when they are most likely to starve. If you do one thing, fill your garden with early-flowering bulbs - they are cheap and easy to grow, plant a handful every year - even if you have only tubs or windowboxes!

Snowdrops & crocuses
Winter aconites
Daphnes
Siberian squil
Stinking hellebore
Mahonia
Sweet box
Winter-flowering clematis



Summer superstars

The choice of flowers for summer is vast. Anything that flowers in June is helpful as there is often a lull between spring and summer flowers known as the June gap, when bees can starve. Late summer flowers are also important. My favourite summer plants suitable for bees of all types are:

Asters (Michelmas daisies)
Anchusa
Buddlejah
Borage
Calendula
Cosmos
Dahlias (single)
Echinacea (coneflowers, rudbeckia)

Echiums/viper's bugloss
Eupatorium
Fuchsia
Forget-me-not
Foxglove
Gaillardia
Helleniums
Hyssop
Lambs ears
Lavender (intemedia *Gros bleu* especially good)
Lungwort
Meadow foam (poached egg plant)
Nepeta - catmint
Phacelia (can be used as a green manure)
Rock rose
Rudbekia
Salvias
Sedums (stonecrop)
Sunflowers
Veronica
Virginia creeper/Boston ivy



Trees and shrubs

A tree in flower is like a meadow in the sky and can provide far more food for bees than if the space it takes up were planted with ordinary flowers. Shrubs too provide more than their fair share of food for the space they occupy. If you have a hedge, try to make sure it will flower and contains a number of native species like willow, hawthorne and hazel.

Acers (maples & sycamore)
Apple (including crab apples)
Ceanothus (Californian lilac)
Cherries
Cotoneaster
Eucryphia
False acacia
Goat willow (*Salix caprea*)

Golden rain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)
Hawthorne
Judas tree
Korean bee tree (*Tetradium danielli*)
Limes
Stawberry tree (*Arbutus*)
Mountain ash (rowan)
Plums (including wild varieties, damsons, etc)

Herbs

Flowering herbs are tremendously attractive to bees – think of that delicious, dark honey you've had on holiday in the Mediterranean. Herbs need to flower to be useful to bees, so allow them to do so – perhaps cutting different parts back to encourage new growth for you to harvest and letting other parts flower.

Borage	Mints
Chives (all alliums)	Oregano
Fennel	Rosemary
Lemon balm	Sage
Marjoram	Thyme



The vegetable plot

Some vegetables produce flowers that need to be pollinated in order to produce delicious things for you to eat. More flowers in your garden will encourage more bees - and you'll get better crops. But don't forget that many vegetables flower after they have produced the crop you want. Leaving veg to 'go over' helps support the local bee population, so please let at least some of them flower before you dig them up.

Flowers for pollination

Artichokes (Jerusalem and globe)
Beans (especially red-flowered runners and broad beans)
Squashes, courgettes and pumpkins
Tomatoes
Aubergines

Leave to go over

Alliums (onions, leeks, garlic)
Asparagus
Cabbages, kale and broccoli
Carrots and parsnips
Rocket (bees love this)

Weeds

Many of the plants that grow in and around our gardens unbidden by us provide some of the most valuable flowers for bees. The royal couple of wild flowers are the dandelion and the bramble. Dandelions flower in early spring when bees really need some help – please don't cut them when in flower, and encourage your council to leave verges well alone. Brambles flower from May until September and are a staple for bees, butterflies, hoverflies and wasps (they are important too!).

Dandelions
Brambles
Germander speedwell
Green alkanet
Ground ivy
Himalayan balsam (invasive and shouldn't be planted)



Lawns

Primped and preened, traditional lawns are lifeless – and take a lot of work. Low-growing wild flowers can turn a lawn into a haven for bees and butterflies. Just think how good it would be if just some of the UK's 2 million acres of lawn became wildflower meadows. Best of all, it saves you work – you don't have to mow as often. If you set the blade high, many of these flowers will learn to stay short and produce many more flowers. If you want a bit of order, mow a path or two through the lawn just to show the wilderness is intentional. Alternatively, have just a patch or two of wilderness. Many of these flowers will appear on their own, but you can buy and sow seeds as well. Plug plants are easier to establish.

Bird's foot trefoil	Dovesfoot geranium
Clover (red and white)	Dandelions
Common knapweed	Lady's bedstraw
Common spotted orchid	Rough hawkbit
Cowslips and primroses	Selfheal
Creeping buttercup	Wild/creeping thyme



Wildflower meadows

If you have a field, orchard, or a good-sized lawn you can grow a native wildflower meadow that will look glorious from early to mid-summer. They take a bit of work to get going, so it's worth getting a book on the subject. This won't just be for bees, all manner of insects, birds and invertebrates will benefit.

Agrimony	Corn Cockle	Lady's Bedstraw
Betony	Corn Marigold	Meadow Buttercup
Birds-foot-trefoil	Cornflower	Meadow Cranesbill
Burnet-saxifrage	Devil's-bit Scabious	Meadow Vetchling
Cat's-ear	Field Scabious	Meadowsweet
Common Knapweed	Grass Vetchling	Musk Mallow
Common Spotted Orchid	Greater Knapweed	Oxeye Daisy



And finally ...ivy!

Wonderful ivy – probably the best single thing you can provide for bees and butterflies. And you don't even have to grow it – just avoid chopping it down! Old ivy with thick stems will produce masses of flowers that provide nectar and pollen that will see many pollinators through the winter months. In almost all cases ivy doesn't cause the damage people think it does. So do a bit of research, let it grow, and stand in the autumn sun and watch (and listen) with wonder as the insects appreciate all the hard work you haven't done!



I hope you enjoyed my talk on Gardening for Bees. If so, you might also like my other talk called *Introducing the Amazing Honey Bee!*

Do you know how many eyes a bee has (it's not two!), or which part of its body it uses to taste with (not it's tongue!)? Or how many hundreds of miles of flying it takes to make one teaspoon of honey for your toast? If the answer is no, this talk will inform, amaze and, hopefully, entertain you.

Please email to make a booking: beesknees1972@gmail.com

Beekeeping for Gardeners

"A visually captivating guide, essential for all bee enthusiasts and garden lovers. It provides precise instructions on nurturing honey bees, bumblebees and solitary bees, accompanied by a helpful guide to the plants that attract and support our vital pollinators."

Jekka McVicar

Herb garden designer and writer. Winner of 62 RHS Gold medals

"Beautifully written and lavishly illustrated - this is surely the garden bee bible."

Dr George McGavin

Broadcaster, entomologist and author

"Richard immerses us in the wonderful world of bees. This book is informative, entertaining and compelling - it's the bees' knees!"

Sarah Mead

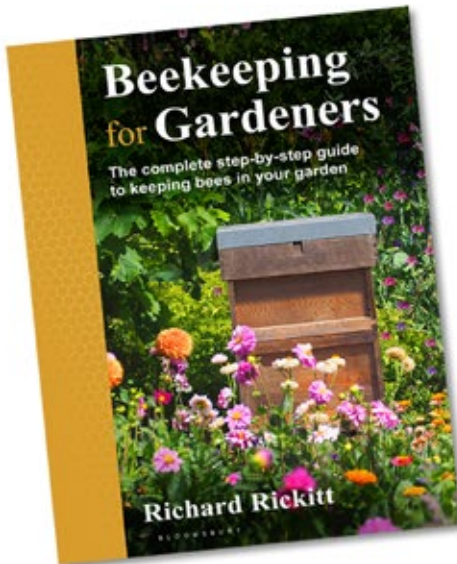
Chelsea gold medal-winner

Head gardener at Yeo Valley Organic Gardens

"Expert advice from a leading beekeeper. Whether you want to keep bees, encourage bees to your garden or just learn more about them, this is the book you need."

Professor Jürgen Tautz

Author and world-renowned bee researcher



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