

Creating habitat for pollinators in community spaces

Our insects are in trouble — much of the vital habitats which support pollinators and other insects is being rapidly lost due to urbanisation and the intensification of agriculture. This means it is increasingly difficult for pollinators to find suitable areas for foraging, nesting and hibernating, causing populations to decline. But you can help...

There are many different ways to create pollinator-friendly habitat, no matter what kind of space you have. Whether you are looking to transform your garden, create a pollinator patch in your local park or simply encourage pollinators to visit your balcony or windowsill, there are plenty of things you can do.

If you can, it is best to create a variety of habitat types to provide for different species and different life cycle stages throughout the year — but anything you can do will be beneficial.



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Don't be too tidy!!

One of the simplest things you can do to help pollinators in your garden or green space is nothing at all! Resisting the urge to keep everything neat and tidy and instead leaving areas to grow a bit wild will attract a huge range of insects and provide beneficial habitat.

- Mow your lawn a little less often or leave a patch to grow long. Allow plants such as buttercups, daisies, self-heal, clovers and dandelions to flower and provide valuable nectar sources. Rough, uncut grass will also provide valuable nesting habitat for bumblebees.
- Don't pull up all your 'weeds'! Plants that many would consider weeds are beautiful wildflowers which provide important food sources for pollinators.



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Dead wood, log piles and insect hotels

Thousands of species, including many pollinators, use dead wood for nesting and sheltering.

To build a log pile, simply pile a few logs in an undisturbed area and leave them be. You could also add in dead branches, leaves and old cuttings that you might otherwise throw away. If you want to create something a bit fancier, try building an insect hotel by stacking old wooden pallets on top of each other, and filling the gaps with twigs, branches, leaves, moss and any other natural material you can find.

On larger sites it may be that dead wood occurs naturally, such as dead, rotting or fallen trees—these should be left alone and not removed if possible.



© Buglife

Create a wildflower meadow

Creating a wildflower meadow is a great way to bring a splash of colour to an area while providing essential habitat for pollinators! You can create large-scale meadows or small wildflower patches depending on the space you have.

Seed mixes which contain both wildflowers and grasses will provide the most benefits—make sure to obtain seeds which are native to Scotland (or at least native to the UK) and that have been grown locally if possible.

Sow your meadow in either autumn or early spring. Choose a spot that gets plenty of sunshine then clear any existing vegetation to remove nutrients and create bare areas onto which the seed can be sown. Sprinkle the seeds onto the bare earth and gently press them in with your hands or feet or lightly drag a rake over the soil, then lightly water the whole area.

To maintain your meadow, cut it once a year in the autumn once flowers have seeded and remove the cuttings. This is to ensure nutrients do not leach back into the ground as wildflowers thrive on poor-nutrient soil. You should also never use fertiliser on your meadow for this reason.

Wildflower meadows can take a little while to fully establish, so don't be discouraged if you don't see a lot coming up in the first year. If you have sown a mixture of annuals and perennials, you will see the annuals (like poppies and cornflowers) blooming in the first year and then the perennial species should establish in the following years. If you have sown purely annuals, these will flower for the first year only and then die off, so will need to be re-sown each year.



© Claire Pumfrey

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Plant nectar-rich plants

If you don't have space for a meadow, you can still provide forage for pollinators by simply planting plants with nectar-rich flowers! Plant straight into the soil, into planters, pots or window boxes. You could even create a vegetable or herb garden. Again, source native and locally grown plants if possible, and try to plant a variety so that you have flowers in bloom during all seasons throughout the year.

Some examples of plants that are great for pollinators:

Wildflowers: bugle, common cowslip, common yarrow, sneezewort, common knapweed, oxeye daisy, common toadflax, devil's-bit scabious, meadow cranesbill, common foxglove, lady's bedstraw, honey-suckle, bluebells, primrose, red campion, common comfrey, common poppy, corn marigold, bell heather

Shrubs and trees: crab apple, wild cherry, brambles, wild raspberry, willow, blackthorn, hawthorn, rowan, guelder rose, dog rose, wild privet

Herbs: wild thyme, wild basil, wild strawberry, wild garlic, chicory, corn mint

Vegetable plants: wild parsnip, tomatoes, courgettes, runner beans and sweet peas



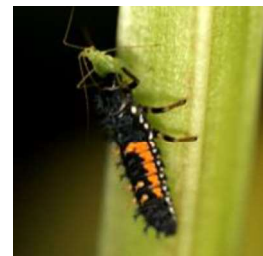
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Use natural pest control!

An effective alternative to using pesticides (which can harm some pollinators) is to encourage natural predators of the pests by providing them with suitable habitat. For example, wildflowers attract ladybirds which eat greenfly. Growing some key plants alongside your vegetables and garden plants will both reduce the number of pests and look very attractive.

Examples of companion planting:

- Marigolds emit a strong odour that will repel greenfly and blackfly
- Grow sage with carrots, they both have a strong scent that will repel each other's pests
- Garlic, chives and coriander all help to repel greenfly
- Yarrow attracts insects like ladybirds and hoverflies which eat greenfly



© Francis Rowland



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Create a pond or wetland area

Creating a wetland area in your garden or community space will provide vital habitat for a range of invertebrates and other water-loving wildlife. Use old containers, planters, basins or even an old sink to create a mini pond if you don't have much space or, if you're feeling ambitious, dig a larger pond in a suitable area and use a pond liner or a pre-formed plastic pond to hold the water.

- Shallow is best—The pond need only be up to 30cm deep to keep the water oxygen-rich
- Try to create gently-shelving or sloping edges—Most aquatic life lives around the shoreline rather than in open water.
- Fill with rain—Let the pond fill naturally or fill it from a water butt. The chemistry of tap water isn't suitable for most aquatic life.



© Steven Falk

Next, add some vegetation; submerged plants provide oxygen and shelter, emergent plants at the edge of the pond such as rushes provide extra habitat and a route out of the water, and flowering wetland plants around and next to your pond provide a source of nectar and pollen.

Flowering plants for wetlands: marsh marigold, cuckoo flower, wild angelica, water avens, yellow flag iris, ragged robin, purple loosestrife, white waterlily, water forget-me-not, greater bird's-foot trefoil, common valerian



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