

ENCOURAGING BEEES



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WHY?

Bees, like so many of our insects in the UK, are subject to multiple threats from:

- Pesticide use in farms and gardens
- The destruction and fragmentation of habitat as fields and cities are enlarged
- The impact of climate change on plants and habitat.

According to the Wildlife Trusts, insects account for the pollination of one third of all the food we eat, with only a small fraction of this being from bees in managed hives. The rest is done for free, by wild bees and many other insects such as hoverflies, flies, beetles, butterflies and moths: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/savingbees>

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/how-bee-friendly>

HOW?

To encourage and support bees and other pollinating insects, we need to offer habitat, shelter, food and water, whilst also refraining from activities which harm them.

HABITAT

There are over 250 different types of bee in the UK. Some are solitary and some are social, so they have different preferences of habitat and food sources.

Queen bumblebees often build their nests in old mouse nests at the bottom of hedges or compost heaps. Alternatively, some excavate their own nests in loamy soil, while still others prefer to nest in grassy tussocks. Bumblebees in nests die out in late summer, with only the young queen surviving, overwintering underground on her own. Other bees overwinter as pupae and emerge as adults in the warmth of spring.



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You can encourage bees and insects by offering them places to overwinter, such as bee and bug hotels, where they will be undisturbed. Making these are great activities at church events which everyone can join in, and provide an excellent opportunity for communicating why bees need protection:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/02/where-do-bees-go-in-winter/>

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/make-a-bee-house>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-bug-mansion>

PLANTING FOR BEES

There are many web-based resources with suggestions of plants to encourage bees and other pollinators. The key is to ensure there is a year-round supply of nectar and pollen; the sleepy bumblebee appearing on a warm day in February needs speedy access to refreshment, as do the hordes of insects around in June and September.

Look for plants which offer pollen or nectar which an insect can access – whether up a tube like a foxglove or on a landing platform like cow parsley. There are many beautiful flowers which are so clustered by petals that it is impossible for any insect to get in so avoid these. Also avoid plants which have been bred not to produce nectar or pollen. You will soon spot them as they will not host any insect visitors! The Bumblebee Conservation Trust suggests a month by month menu:

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/how-to-make-a-bee-friendly-garden/>

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/beethechange/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Gardening-Bumblebees-Getting-Started.pdf>

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/03/wildflowers-for-bees/>



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JOIN A PROJECT ENCOURAGING BEES

A number of charities now offer 'bee starter kits' containing seeds, identification sheets and information about bees. These are very useful ways to help your communication with church and community about why it's so important to support them: <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/beethechange/>

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/donate-save-britains-bees-get-your-bee-saver-kit-today>

THINGS TO REFRAIN FROM

1. Avoid using pesticides. The class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids has been clearly linked to harm to bees. These pesticides are used to control aphids which spread viruses in crops. Whilst they are banned in the UK and on most crops in the EU, they are used in other parts of the world and are from time to time allowed in the UK for emergency use. According to UK Bee expert and author, Professor Dave Goulson, the most commonly used pesticide, Roundup, is harmful to bees, damages soil health, and is strongly suspected of causing non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in humans. Dave Goulson on 'Why you don't need pesticides in your garden!' <https://youtu.be/LZ1aZwyJ9rY>
2. Leaf blowers have been linked to declining insect populations, as they blow them around and damage them, so please avoid!



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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

If you want to keep bees, or would like more detailed information, contact the British Beekeepers Association for advice: <https://www.bbka.org.uk/>

Some fun facts about bees from the Soil Association:

<https://www.soilassociation.org/take-action/growing-at-home/bee-organic/10-facts-about-bees/>

Kew Gardens have created a 17m tall replica hive linked to a real hive so you can have first-hand experience of being inside a real hive:

<https://www.kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-in-the-gardens/the-hive>