

# Gardening for bumblebees

Bumblebees are hard-working, loveable creatures, but their populations are experiencing great declines. Changes in agricultural techniques have meant that there are far fewer wildflowers in the landscape than there used to be, meaning that many of our bumblebee species are struggling to survive. As bumblebees can only feed from flowers, some species have entirely disappeared from much of the countryside.



The good news is that gardens have been acting as a haven for bumblebees for many years. Some species are now more common in urban and suburban gardens than they are in the wider countryside.

Follow our guide to planting and your garden will be buzzing with bumblebees!

## How Bee kind is your garden?



Find out how bee-friendly your garden is by using our Bee kind app. Select the flowers that you have in your garden to calculate your score and then receive a tailored list of 10 more flowers to add to help the bees even more. <http://beekind.bumblebeeconservation.org/>

## Spring



The bumblebee lifecycle begins in spring, when the queen emerges from hibernation. She will have spent the winter hibernating on her own in the soil, so her first task is to feed on nectar-rich flowers to rebuild her energy stores. When she has fed, the queen will search for a nest.

The queen then gathers yet more nectar, as well as pollen, from flowers. She stores the nectar in little wax pots inside the nest, and lays her eggs nearby. The queen lies on top of these eggs, and shivers to keep them warm. This first batch of eggs will all hatch into female workers.

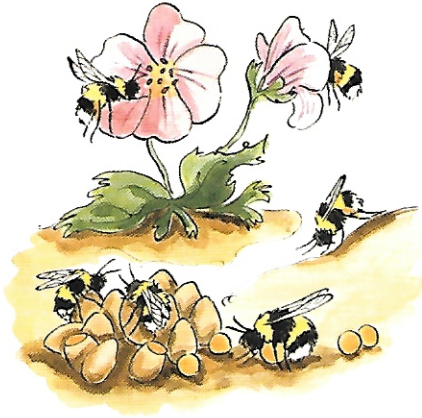
This period of food collection is essential for the nest – if the queen doesn't establish a successful nest at this stage, the nest and queen could die. These are some of the best spring-flower plants for gardens – plant these to feed starving queens and growing nests.



### Spring flowers

- Bluebell
- Bugle
- California lilac
- Comfrey
- Crocus
- Dicentra
- Flowering currant
- Lungwort
- Mahonia
- Pieris
- Pussy willow
- Viburnum

## Early summer



The young worker bees will require a lot of food to help them survive and grow, meaning much more nectar and pollen is needed from flowers.

Plant some of these to make sure that the young worker bees get a good start in life.



In early summer, the nest will begin to grow larger. Some of the workers will collect more food for the nest, while others will tend the nest and the next batch of workers that the queen has laid.

### Early summer flowers

- Allium
- Aquilegia
- Borage
- Campanula
- Catmint
- Cotoneaster
- Geranium
- Globe thistle
- Poppy
- Snapdragon
- Sweet pea
- Thyme



## Late summer

In late summer, the nests of most species begin to produce males and new queens. Until this stage, the queen won't have laid any eggs that hatch into males. As their only role is to mate with the new queens from other nests, the males leave the nest and cannot return. Their days and nights are spent outdoors, mostly clinging to flowers or 'cruising' hedgerows, looking for queens with which to mate.

Producing new queens and males takes a lot of energy, and nests can only do it when they reach a large size, with a good store of food. If a nest doesn't produce males or new queens, it has ultimately failed. In late summer then, the nest will again need a good supply of food from flowers to feed the queens and males, so try some of these plants.



### Late summer flowers

- Buddleia
- Cornflower
- Cosmos
- Echinacea
- Foxglove
- Honeysuckle
- Lavender
- Lupin
- Marjoram
- Nasturtium
- Sedum
- Verbena



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