

**There is something very 'back to nature' about the idea of planting your window box, flowerbed, garden, grand estate to attract bees, butterflies**

and other pollinators. Creating in the mind's eye - visions of high summer and green spaces awash with the flicker of butterflies, zzzit of hoverflies and the satisfying hum of bees. For images visit the website article <http://www.karisgarden.com/chapters/bees.htm>

It is definitely important to encourage insects, some such as butterflies and bees are more welcome than others but many insects help to pollinate fruit and vegetable flowers as well as providing food for other creatures. Mammals such as bats, and birds rely on good sources of flying, scuttling and crawling insects including caterpillars and grubs.

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## **Pollinators**

**Bees** - where would we be without them? Not all bees live in hives, solitary bees are the first to emerge in early spring from underground and bumble about looking for nectar. There are links at the bottom of the page to detailed reference sites for more information about bees and their habits.

**Moths** often have a bad press, many people dislike them for their habit of clustering around lights at night and generally humming and bumping into things [although some are actually day fliers]. Many also appear rather boring and brown and look similar to the untrained eye and mind [but I can at least recognise a Clothes Moth in situ which is probably useful]. Of the 2400 recorded British moths rather a number are unfortunately garden pests. The Magpie a striking black and white moth apparently favours gooseberries and currants but is in decline and there are all those lovely tortrix moth larvae to contend with - so inviting some of them into your garden is possibly a mixed blessing.

**Various flies, lacewings and hoverflies** are pollinators and food [as well as aphid control]. As a digression - some of our native plants 'eat' flies [albeit small ones] so should get a mention. Sundews [Drosera] live in generally acidic boggy areas. They derive their nourishment from the flies that get stuck guzzling the nectar that accompanies the sticky goo on the 'leaves'. The 'leaf' gradually curls over the trapped insect triggered by the desperate attempts to escape and digestion begins. The Butterwort [Pinguicula] is another native 'bogger', very small flies get stuck on the leaves and are slowly digested. I have also found that hoverflies like my trumpet lilies which are located near my Sarracenia [a US pitcher plant], the hoverflies initially attracted to the lily were lured in by the pitcher plant and set the pitchers pitifully abuzz as they got trapped and skidded down the slippery throat into the flies composting at the bottom.

I find flies particularly attracted to the unopened buds of Liliun leucanthum [an autumn flowering lily that looks like the earlier flowering L.regale]. Maybe the 'carrion' undertow in the lily's scent was being given off by the bud? Flies are also attracted to the real 'stinkers' such as the Stinkhorn fungus and non natives such as the Dragon Arum [Dracunculus], the smell of rotting flesh again. Many umbellifer flowers also seem attractive to flies. Flies generally being unwelcome Common Elder was often planted and used in the past to deter flies.

**There are 56 species of native butterfly** in the UK and some summer visitors, the most commonly seen are Tortoiseshells and the 'Cabbage' Whites. When planting for butterflies and bees think about the lifecycle. Overwintering species such as Tortoiseshells wake up with the first warmth in spring and need ready sources of nectar, as do solitary and other bees which you see bumbling about on the first warm days. Butterflies need plants to feed on and feed their caterpillars and those overwintering require some later sources of nectar in the autumn.

## **Plants to attract insects**

Some butterfly and moth plants are not exactly 'garden plants', for example a number have nettle as a caterpillar food plant [Urtica doicus]. Of course nettles can be made into beer [or so I understand] and you could always go into the nettle weaving business [sort of hemp like], but overall nettles are not the most exciting prospect for the less wild

gardener. So some decisions have to be taken from the outset in your quest to attract beneficial insects - how wild do you want your garden?

Other choices will be dictated by the area you live in and the soil type - for example some good nectar and foodplants are in the Vaccinium or bilberry family which only grow on acid soils.

Most of us have been unwilling hosts to the green caterpillars of the Small White Butterfly or the yellow and grey offspring of the Large White Butterfly [normally lumped together as Cabbage Whites]. They soon make short, messy, smelly lacework of brassicas and nasturtiums. I have even seen them somehow squeeze themselves through netting to get at brassicas. Maybe realistically you only want to be a nectar and pollen garden rather than a foodplant supplier for all comers?

## Spring

An important time to provide nectar and food sources for waking overwintering butterflies and bees.

Aubretia - familiar perennial purple splotches of flowers that cascade from, and over walls. There are quite a few to choose from in varying shades of purple, bluey-purple to pinky - Kitte is one with huge flowers, quite striking if a little intimidating.

Wallflowers [Erysimum] - perennials although we mostly discard the bedding varieties after flowering. Some seed companies supply single colours such as Blood Red [right]. Other 'shrubbier' types such as Bowles' Mauve, Sprite [yellow] and John Codrington [cream/bronze] have a longer life and can be kept going from cuttings when the plants begin to look too woody. Bedding types can be started off from seed in May/June to flower the following year.

Cuckoo Flower [Cardamine pratensis] - This is a wild flower of damp pastures with pale lilac flowers in April. It is particularly attractive to the Orange Tip butterfly as a food plant. There are some selected forms available including a double flowered plant.

Skimmia - these shrubs are attractive to bees and are in flower from late March - May and are also well scented which is an added bonus.

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Also consider: Honesty [Lunaria], arabis, pulmonaria, rosemary and presumably some of the earlier flowering bulbs - one source suggests Anemone blanda as a good early pollen and nectar source.

## Summer

Nectar sources are in much greater abundance through late spring into summer: Consider the 'labiates' which are attractive to many insects, these include, nepeta, agastache, hyssop, mints, thyme, origanum, salvia, lavender and marjoram.

Borage is a good bet as are others in the family which include echium and alkanet.

Knautias and scabious are another family group to look out for especially as a number are later summer flowering. Thuggish teasels are also wonderful for insects and later birds especially goldfinches but are thuggish and aggressive self seeders.

Umbellifers seem to be more attractive to flies and hoverflies and are an acquired taste for some, they include angelica, Sweet Cicely [Myrrhis odorata], eryngiums and astrantia.

Thistles are popular with some insects and there are a few that have made it into the garden including *Cirsium rivulare* *Atropurpureum* [top right] and *Galactites tomentosa*. Other pricklies include acanthus - bees heave their way noisily in to the heavy flowers and echinops.

Brambles are noted as popular nectar plants for many moths and butterflies, whether this applies to more ornamental rubus I don't know.

Also consider - Poached Egg Plant [Limnanthes] which is easily grown from seed; *Verbena bonariensis* and single marigolds [Tagetes].

Leguminous plants i.e. pea flowered - vetches, beans and trees such as *Genista aetnensis* flowering in June/July. Other useful shrubs and climbers include buddleja, escallonia, various honeysuckles and hebes.

## **Autumn**

For the autumn as food sources start to decrease it is a good idea to choose flowering plants to attract later emerging butterflies and bees.

Sedum - often known as the 'Butterfly Plants' are classic for late summer. The flowers range from white to deep pinky reds, some have lax growth, others are more upright. Foliage comes in plain soft green, variegated and various purples, Matrona [pictured right] is a taller growing cultivar with purpled foliage, Purple Emperor has the deepest purple-black foliage. I have found some are difficult to establish well. Sedum can be grown from seed, division or rooted cuttings.

Asters - many are available including the singles with clouds of small daisy flowers. Aster turbinellus has tall purple stems and sprays of lilac flowers and is one of the latest to flower with me. White Climax is another very later flowerer.

Solidago - Golden Rod, not exactly a favourite flower of mine but there are some more delicate selections around if the blaring yellow is a bit overpowering.

Also consider: echinacea, heleniums, eupatorium, lythrum, sunflowers [helianthus] and shrubs such as caryopteris.

## **Native and wild food plants for caterpillars**

This is a random rather than exhaustive selection of the moths found in the UK and some of the butterflies [OK so I chose the moths for their names]. Quite a few moths have trees as their main caterpillar foodplant and some of the butterflies stake out their territories in trees but don't feed on them e.g. Speckled Wood. Others feed on grasses and weeds such as dock, dandelion and bindweed [hooray!].

Some have plants they resort to if the main one is in short supply. The Cinnabar Moth with its satin black, red spotted wings favours ragwort and groundsel but I have seen its black and yellow banded caterpillars on the silver ornamental senecios too.

Key: Black text = moths Green text = butterflies. Links to detailed reference web sites are given below the list.

## **Trees and Shrubs**

Salix spp [Willow] - Poplar Hawk Moth, Dingy Mocha, Lunar Hornet Moth, Scallop Shell, Purple Emperor, Comma

Blackthorn [Prunus spinosa] - The Lackey, The Lappett, Brown Hairstreak  
Brambles [Rubus] - Peach Blossom, Fox Moth, The Emperor Moth [also a nectar plant for many butterflies and moths]

Buckthorn - Brimstone

Aspen/Poplar - Poplar Hawk Moth, Puss Moth

Birch - Peacock Moth, Yellow Horned, Satin Lutestring

Oak - Blotched Emerald, Maiden's Blush, Purple Hairstreak

Holly - Holly Blue

Bilberry [Vaccinium] - Northern Spinach, Scallop Shell [also noted in the US as a butterfly plant]

## **Perennials and climbers**

Galium [Bedstraw] - Humming Bird Hawk Moth [not native], Elephant Hawk Moth, Devon Carpet

Calystegia/Convolvulus [Bindweed] - White Plume Moth, Convolvulus Hawk Moth

Nettle [Urtica dioica] - Mother of Pearl, The Spectacle, Peacock, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma

Toadflax [Linaria] and snapdragons - Toadflax Pug [many have the foodplant as part of their name which is a big clue!]

Crucifers - Large White, Small White, Bath White, Orange Tip [e.g. Hedge Mustard and Cardamine]

Wild Mignonette [Reseda] - Small White, Bath White

Clover - Bath White, Clouded Yellow

Birdsfoot Trefoil [Lotus corniculatus] - Clouded Yellow, Silver Studded Blue, Common Blue, Dingy Skipper

Sorrels & Docks [Rumex] - Blood Vein, Small Copper

Kidney Vetch [Anthyllis vulneraria] - Small Blue

Ivy [Hedera helix] - Holly Blue [also the flowers make ivy a good late season nectar plant]

Rock Rose [Helianthemum nummularium] - Silver Studded Blue, Brown Argus

Heather [Calluna/Erica] - Fox Moth, Silver Studded Blue

Crane's Bills [Geranium] - Brown Argus

Horseshoe Vetch [Hippocrepis comosa] - Chalkhill Blue

Restharrow [*Ononis repens*] - Common Blue  
Honeysuckle [*Lonicera*] - White Emperor  
Hop [*Humulus lupulus*] - Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma  
Thistles - Thistle Ermine, Painted Lady  
Violets - Silver Washed Fritillary  
Devil's Bit Scabious [*Succisa pratensis* - acid soil] - Marsh Fritillary  
Fescue [a fine type of grass] - Marbled White, Small Heath  
Other grasses - Ringlet, Large Heath, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Small Skipper

## Night fliers

Some of the night flying moths are attracted to the flowers that start to pump out their perfume as evening falls, these include Honeysuckles such as *Lonicera periclymenum* [Woodbine] and *L. caprifolium*; tender plants such as Tobacco plants - *Nicotiana glauca* and *N. glauca* and *Mirabilis jalapa* also Evening Primrose [*Oenothera speciosa*] and early summer flowering Dame's Violet [*Hesperis matronalis*]. *Pyracantha* in flower also seems to come alive with moths just around sunset.

## Grasshoppers

Not strictly pollinators but a summer garden wouldn't be the same without the scratching of these insects. Pictured are Meadow Grasshoppers, Field Grasshoppers are brown. They lay eggs in soil in shorter grass which overwinter and start to hatch in May. And yes they eat grass I have watched them devour blades.

**What is it with Beetles and weevil?** Some are beneficial it's true - but others are not at all welcome - you don't want Lily Beetles, cheerful orange beetles which lay orange eggs on the undersides of lily leaves and other plants in the lily family like fritillaries. The grubs cover themselves in excrement, heartily munch away at the host plant and then hibernate in the soil to emerge all glossy and triumphant on warm days in May and June. If seen, cup your hand under the leaf [they drop to the ground very fast if you miss] tap gently and squash! Asparagus Beetles are also cheerful sparkly looking little beetles with a similar habit - be warned. Vine weevils really are beyond the pale and are particularly a problem with potted plants - they chomp away at roots all winter often killing the plant, emerging in summer in June and July rather a boring dull dark grey matte in colour to chomp indents into the sides of leaves

and start the process all over again.....

I have also been reminded by a correspondent to warn people that bees sting ..... treat them with respect!

## **Links**

**Bumblebees** - <http://www.bumblebee.org/key.htm>

**Solitary Bees** also Lacewings and Hoverflies  
- <http://www.kendall-bioresearch.co.uk/solbee.htm>

**Butterfly Conservation Society [UK]** - <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org>

**Moths [UK]** - <http://ukmoths.org.uk>

**Natural History Museum host plants database**  
- <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/projects/hostplants>

**Butterflies and Moths [Europe]** - <http://www.leps.it>

**Butterfly Plants [selected US]** - <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/for/for98/for98.htm>

If you live in South Somerset the **Carymoor Environmental Centre** Butterfly Dragon is well worth visiting as is the **Somerset Wildflower Collection** where you can see many of the foodplants up close. <http://www.carymoor.org.uk/research/ButterflyConservation.htm>

## **References:**

Butterflies of Britain and Europe [1998] Michael Chinery

The Wildflowers of Britain and Northern Europe [1996] Fitter et al

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