

Sharing our story: Useful plants for wildlife



Provided by Pam Martin, St John Levens, Gold Eco Church

Pam says, "These lists are not exclusive – just my personal favourites planted in my own garden for wildlife":

POLLINATORS

November to February/March:

- **Hellebores:** an herbaceous perennial; make sure you choose cultivars where you can see the stamens!
- **Viburnum tinus:** an evergreen shrub that has pretty white flowers right through the winter and then black berries for the birds later in the season.
- **Coronilla citrina 'Glauca':** a small shrub with pale lemon yellow, pea-like flowers right the way through autumn and winter and attractive grey/green foliage in spring and summer.
- A wide variety of bulbs: choose a variety of flowering times and only single flowers where insects can access the nectar.
- **Ivy (Hedera helix):** there are often flowers and berries on different parts of the plant at the same time and it can provide shelter for birds and small mammals. A super provider!
- **Mahonia cultivars:** an evergreen shrub with fragrant yellow flowers in the winter, followed by purple berries.

Spring and early summer:

- **Perennial geraniums:** low-growing ground cover plants needing very little attention. They can survive dry conditions well. They will continue to flower right up to the first frosts, particularly if you cut them back after their first flush of flowers (late June/early July) – when they will form a new flush. The wild version, *Geranium pratense*, is taller than many

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cultivated varieties and looks good both in a border and in a meadow context.

- **Catmint** (*Nepeta* cultivars): lovely lilac-coloured flowers. To stop the plants getting too untidy, cut back hard once the first flowers are fading and they will flower again.
- **Lungwort** (*Pulmonaria* cultivars): low-growing herbaceous plant with flowers ranging from pale pink through purple to deep blue. Flowers in spring.
- **Comfrey** (*Symphytum officinale* 'Bocking 14'): flowers May – August and beyond. Very tough, needs no attention. Chop it down regularly to stop it getting too big and use the leaves to make comfrey tea (recipes online) or to activate your compost. Makes a high potash fertiliser – so a natural chemical-free feed for flowering and fruiting plants.
- **Leopard's Bane** (*Doronicum* cultivars): an herbaceous perennial, bright yellow daisy-like flowers in early spring. There are tall and dwarf varieties – so choose carefully!
- **Plum Thistle** (*Cirsium rivulare*): an herbaceous perennial. Not a prickly thistle, so easy to accommodate! Deadhead regularly for extended flowering.
- **Erysimum** (*Bowles Mauve*): a perennial wallflower (albeit short-lived, so after 2/3 years take cuttings). Copes well with dry conditions and will flower profusely if you deadhead. In a mild winter they will continue to flower to some degree through the year. Particularly loved by butterflies.
- **Clematis cultivars**: but only the single flowered ones! I love *Clematis Montana* 'Elizabeth' and *Clematis Montana* 'Tetrarose' – both of which have the most heavenly scent which fills the garden, and beautiful pink flowers (Tetrarose is slightly deeper in colour) with yellow centres, set off against bronze/red foliage.
- **Pyracantha cultivars**: evergreen shrubs which can form quite a high hedge (2m+) but can also be maintained at whatever height you want. It positively buzzes with bees and hoverflies gorging on the nectar in its small white flowers. These are followed by yellow, orange and red berries for the birds and squirrels later in the year.
- **Foxgloves** (*Digitalis* cultivars): mostly biennial but there are some perennial varieties. The wild version *Digitalis purpurea* is biennial and gently seeds itself round the garden. I just give it room to roam – and it always looks good!

Mid – late summer and frequently also into autumn:

- **Field Scabious** (*Knautia arvensis*): Lovely blue flowers in July and August
- **Giant Hyssop** (*Agastache* cultivars): an herbaceous perennial which likes well drained soil or it will not survive the winter. Can grow to 1m. Spikes of deep blue flowers.
- **Lavender cultivars**: one of the best for bees is *Lavandula x intermedia* 'Gros bleu'.
- **Dahlia cultivars**: but only use those with single, daisy-like flowers like 'Bishop of Llandaff' (bright red flowers with yellow centres), or 'Bishop's Children' (multicoloured hybrids of Llandaff). Dead head for continued flowering. Will flower until the first frosts.
- **Marjoram** (*Origanum vulgare*): native perennial – low growing. Lovely pinky-purple flowers beloved of many different pollinators. Good for cooking and in salads too!
- **Sneezewort** (*Helenium* cultivars): herbaceous perennial. 'Moerheim Beauty' and 'Sahins Early' are particularly beautiful, but they are all lovely. Some grow up to 2m tall – check the label!

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- **Thyme cultivars:** especially *Thymus polytrichus* subsp. *Britiannicus* – low-growing, rambling, perennial plant for a pot, or cracks in a patio/path or the front of a border.
- **Viper's bugloss** (*Echium vulgare*): biennial wildflower – pale green foliage and purple flower spikes growing up to 1m – offers copious nectar
- **Buddleia cultivars:** Deciduous shrub – Long panicles of flowers in white, pink and purple. Loved by butterflies. These plants will grow anywhere – and in good soil will get very big and very untidy – but they can be cut right down after flowering every couple of years to keep them tidier and easier to manage.
- **Echinops cultivars:** herbaceous perennial – seeds very freely so can become invasive – dig up new seedlings as they appear. Various shades of blue drumstick flowers – choose the deeper blue for best effect. I've never seen so many pollinators vying for space on one flower as I have on these!
- **Rose cultivars:** but only single-flowered varieties like *Rosa rugosa*, *Rosa glauca* etc.

Autumn (Many of the summer plants keep on flowering if you deadhead regularly):

- **Sedum cultivars;** especially 'Herbstfreude' / 'Autumn Joy'. Herbaceous perennial. Loved by butterflies.
- **Ivy** (*Hedera helix*)

BIRDS / SQUIRRELS AND OTHER RODENTS

- **Crab apple** (*Malus sylvestris*): the fruits often hang on the tree until most other berries and fruits have been picked off – because they are very hard. They need a sharp frost to make them soft enough to be accessible to most birds.
- **Dog Rose** (*Rosa canina*): hips loved by birds. Or indeed any other single-flowered rose like the Beach Rose (*Rosa rugosa*)
- **Elder** (*Sambucus nigra*)
- **Rowan** (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
- **Ivy** (*Hedera Helix*)
- **Firethorn** (*Pyracantha coccinea*)
- **Hawthorn** (*Crataegus monogyna*)
- **Oregon grape** (*Mahonia aquifolium*)
- **Amelanchier lamarckii:** A deciduous shrub / small tree. Has pretty, white flowers in early spring followed by new bronze foliage which turns green, and tiny black berries which the blackbirds in particular adore. Then it turns into a glorious fiery autumn colour!