



Flowering Plants for Bees

Flowering times for plants, which affect when pollen and nectar are available for bees, depends on where you live. The plants available, land use and climate directly affect the bees that can thrive in a location, and the better the plants and weather are for them the more successfully they can reproduce and increase their populations.

Winter
Ground Ivy, Gorse, Hellebore, Bluebell, Rosemary, Primrose, Dicentra, Crocus, Pulmonaria, Snakeshead, Daffodil, Snowdrops, Mahonia, Cowslip, Barberry, Genista

Early Spring
Lupin, Thyme, Allium, Cranesbill, Salvia, Rosa, Rugosa

Many honey bees are deterred from foraging in very cool or rainy weather. Bumble bees, however, forage on cooler days and, increasingly, during winter, as the climate changes - meaning that late and very early flowering plants are even more vital.

Spring
Penstemon, Poppy, Lesser Celandine, Forget-me-not, Bistort, Hebe, Comfrey, Columbine, Grape Hyacinth, Foxglove, Sea Holly, Passion Flower, Muscari, Campanula, Bugle, Honeysuckle, Crocus, Chives, Sweet Pea, Allium, Cranesbill, Salvia, Rosa, Rugosa

Early Summer

During spring and summer, all varieties of bee are rearing their young. Honey bee colonies may consist of perhaps 60000 worker bees, also drone (male) bees and the queen and there are many larvae to feed. Pollen and nectar are gathered for storing in the hive as bee bread and honey to feed developing larvae and adult bees. Bumble bees have a communal nest similar to the honey bee. Other, "solitary" bees provision cells with food for single eggs in a hollow stem or hole in a dry bank. Bee friendly plants are vital for the colony to thrive especially in the so-called "June gap" when flowering plants are often few.

Summer
Clover, Scabious, Nasturtium, Phacelia, Salvia, Comflower, Sedum, Hollyhock, Goldenrod, Snapdragon, Himalayan Balsam, Rosebay Willowherb, Red Hot Poker, Nepeta, Bergamot, Bugle, Bergenia

Early Autumn

During late summer and early autumn, flowers continue to provide forage for late developing larvae and those bees already developed into working adults. Early autumn is a critical time for the colony as "special" long-lived winter bees are produced to survive the winter and honey stored to last, hopefully, until Spring.

Himalayan Balsam is a controversial plant as it is invasive, but pollinators appreciate the copious nectar it provides.

Late Autumn
Mint, Viburnum, Mahonia, Ivy, Ling Heather

Ivy is a very widespread and essential plant for late pollen and nectar for bees and other pollinators, and, as a result, a good winter supply of berries for birds. Ivy, being evergreen, also provides dense cover for shelter and nests. The buff-tailed bumble bee and some honey bees will venture out in quite chill conditions if the sun is shining and even small amounts of nectar and pollen are collected.

Spare a thought for trees and hedges. Examples of bee-friendly trees include:

Trees
Blackthorn, Buddleia, Cherry, Hawthorn, Willow, Plum, Lime, Rowan, Horse Chestnut, Apple

Thinking of beekeeping?

The skills for success can be obtained from your local beekeeping association starting with a taster day or beginners' course. They can also guide you through the bewildering selection of books to read. Contact details for Wales at www.wbka.com

The Royal Horticultural Society bee friendly plant list is also available at www.wbka.com