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Jim Foster/Natural England

Plants for wildlife-friendly gardens



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Plants for wildlife-friendly gardens

This leaflet lists some of the many garden plants which can help to attract wildlife to your garden. While plants that occur naturally in England – native species – do have more to offer some forms of wildlife, recent research has seriously challenged once-conventional view that native flora is always best. It is now clear that many cultivated varieties and exotic plants are also good for wildlife, provided that their flowers are not too complex.

For example, highly bred double-flowered varieties produce little or no pollen or nectar and so are not of interest to bees, butterflies or other pollinating insects.

Cowslips. Paul Glendell/Natural England



Please note

Garden plants should never be planted out in the wild and, similarly, wild plants should never be dug up to be planted in the garden.

Digging up wild plants is illegal. It is also usually pointless as many will only thrive on poor soils and will not flourish in gardens. Introducing cultivated plants into the wild has caused severe problems for native wildflowers – and their associated wildlife – and is still doing so. Rhododendron now smothers huge areas of woodland in England (and Wales) and is extremely hard – and expensive – to control. Similarly, the fleshy-leaved Hottentot fig *Carpobrotus edulis* has invaded cliffs in Devon and Cornwall where it forms dense stands, out-competing native species and even

changing the composition of the soil. Various introduced aquatic plants have caused even greater havoc, and it has so far proved impossible even to prevent their further and highly damaging spread.

Do take great care, therefore, and never risk introducing garden plants into wild areas. Discarding the results of weeding over the garden fence – for example, into adjoining allotments, woodland, railway land or wasteland – is irresponsible. All unwanted plant material should instead be composted. The Natural England booklet *Composting and peat-free gardening* has further details. (See Further information, page 14.)

Cottage garden. Paul Keene/Avico Ltd



Trees and shrubs

Large trees

Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*
Beech *Fagus sylvatica*
Cherries *Prunus avium* and *P. padus*
Elm *Ulmus procera*
Oaks *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea*
Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*
White willow *Salix alba*

Medium/small trees

Alder *Alnus glutinosa*
Apples *Malus spp.*
Field maple *Acer campestre*
Holly *Ilex aquifolium*
Pears *Pyrus spp.*
Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*
Silver birch *Betula pendula*
Yew *Taxus baccata*

Plants for hedges

A combination of shrubs and climbers can make attractive hedges of great benefit for wildlife, as well as providing a functional boundary. Beech and holly can also be effective when used to make single species hedges.

Shrubs suitable for hedges

Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*
Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*
Cherry plum *Prunus cerasifera*
Elder *Sambucus nigra*
Guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*
Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*
Hazel *Corylus avellana*
Privets, including wild privet
Ligustrum vulgare



Honeysuckle flower.
Derek Ratcliffe/Natural England

Climbers and 'scramblers'

Climbing brambles *Rubus spp. fruticosus* group (including various cultivars and hybrids, eg loganberries, tayberries etc).
Climbing roses *Rosa spp.* especially wild species such as dog rose *R. canina* and field rose *R. arvensis*
Ivies *Hedera spp.*, including common ivy *H. helix*
Honeysuckles *Lonicera spp.*, including the native *L. periclymenum*
Wild clematis/Old man's beard *Clematis vitalba*



Several bird species are fond of firethorn berries, and blackbirds may nest in this shrub.
Chris Gibson/Natural England

Plants to site under trees or in shady areas

The following species flower early before trees are in full leaf, and will do well in areas that become shady later in the year.

Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*
Bugle *Ajuga reptans*
Daffodils, including wild daffodil
Narcissus pseudonarcissus
Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*
Lily of the valley *Convallaria majalis*
Lords-and-ladies/cuckoopint *Arum maculatum*
Primrose *Primula vulgaris*
Sweet violet *Viola odorata*
Wood avens *Geum urbanum*
Yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*

Other shrubs for nectar, pollen or fruits

These following plants are especially attractive to insects or provide food for birds and other animals.

Bodant viburnum
Viburnum x bodnantense
Californian lilac *Ceanothus spp.*
Creeping cotoneaster
Cotoneaster frigidus
Firethorn *Pyracantha spp.*
Himalayan honeysuckle
Leycesteria formosa
Japanese quince
Chaenomeles japonica
Laurustinus *Viburnum tinus*
Lilac *Syringa vulgaris*
Mahonia *Mahonia spp.*
Mock orange *Philadelphus spp.*
Serviceberry *Amelanchier canadensis*

Warning. Some species of cotoneaster (eg *C. horizontalis*) are invasive and not recommended.

Wildflowers

Native wildflowers for borders

Please note. Any native plant with a simple, open-structured flower is likely to attract pollinating insects. Especially attractive are the flowers of the daisy family (Compositae), the cabbage family (Cruciferae) and the carrot family (Umbelliferae). In addition, members of the huge family of Labiales, which includes mints and deadnettles, are also recommended. The following list is therefore only an indication of the huge variety of wildflowers you could plant in your garden.

- Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*
- Chicory *Chichorium intybus*
- Chives *Allium schoenoprasum*
- Common mallow *Malva sylvestris*
- Common poppy *Papaver rhoeas*
- Corncockle *Agrostemma githago*
- Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*
- Corn marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum*
- Cowslip *Primula veris*
- Dame's-violet *Hesperis matronalis*
- Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*
- Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*
- Field scabious *Knautia arvensis*
- Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*
- Germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*
- Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea*
- Great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*
- Greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*

- Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*
- Herb-robert *Geranium robertianum*
- Lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*
- Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*
- Meadow cranesbill *Geranium pratense*
- Oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
- Primrose *Primula vulgaris*
- Red campion *Silene dioica*
- Spiked speedwell *Veronica spicata*
- Tansy *Tanacetum vulgare*
- Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*
- Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*
- White campion *Silene alba*
- Wild thyme *Thymus drucei*
- Yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*

The poached-egg plant may attract various species of hoverfly.
Chris Gibson/Natural England



Wild thyme. Peter Wakely/Natural England



Cultivated plants for borders

Grecian windflower *Anemone blanda*
 Angelica *Angelica archangelica*
 Aubretia *Aubretia deltoidea*
 California poppy
Eschscholtzia californica
 Candytuft *Iberis sempervirens*
 Christmas rose *Helleborus niger*
 Cosmos *Cosmos bipinnatus*
 Evening primrose *Oenothera biennis*
 Fleabane *Erigeron spp.*
 Forget-me-not *Myosotis spp.*
 French marigold *Tagetes spp.*
 Globe thistle *Echinops ritro*
 Grape hyacinth *Muscari botryoides*
 Hollyhock *Althaea rosea*
 Honesty *Lunaria rediviva*
 Ice plant *Sedum spectabile*
 Lenten rose *Helleborus orientalis*
 Michaelmas daisy *Aster spp.*
 Perennial cornflower
Centaurea montana
 Perennial sunflower
Helianthus decapetalus
 Paul Glendell/Natural England



Marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*.
 Paul Glendell/Natural England

Phlox *Phlox paniculata*
 Poached-egg plant
Limnanthes douglasii
 Purple coneflower
Echinacea purpurea
 Red valerian *Centranthus ruber*
 Snapdragon *Antirrhinum majus*
 Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis*
 Spring crocus
Crocus chrysanthus and hybrids
 Sweet alyssum *Lobularia maritima*
 Sweet bergamot *Monarda didyma*
 Sweet William *Dianthus barbatus*
 Tobacco plant *Nicotiana affinis*
 Wallflower *Cheiranthus cheiri*
 White arabis (single) *Arabis alpina*
 Winter aconite *Eranthis hyemalis*
 Yellow alyssum *Alyssum saxatile*

Drought-tolerant plants

Climate change is now a reality. Some parts of England in recent years have received a lower level of annual rainfall than Jerusalem, while spring and summer hosepipe bans may become a regular feature in the east and south-east at least. It makes sense, therefore, to select plants which, once established, can withstand long periods without being watered. Many of the following species originate from South America, the Mediterranean or the Middle East and are well-suited to dry soils in full sun, as well as providing for the needs of garden wildlife.

Argentinean salvia *Salvia argentea*
 Calamint *Calamintha nepeta ssp. nepeta*
 Cardoon *Cynara cardunculus*
 Chile black scabious *Scabiosa atropurpurea*
 Crimson clover *Trifolium incarnatum*
 Crocus *Crocus tommasinianus*
 Escallonia *Escallonia spp.*
 False dittany *Ballota acetabulosa*
 Giant dead-nettle *Lamium orvala*
 Giant echium *Echium pininana*
 Giant scabious *Cephalaria gigantea*
 Golden-drops *Onosma spp.*
 Honeywort *Cerinthe major* and *C. purpurascens*
 Honey garlic *Nectaroscordium siculum*
 Lamb's lugs (or ears) *Stachys olympica* and *S. lanata*

Jerusalem sage *Phlomis russelliana*
 Marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and its garden form 'Aureum', golden marjoram
 Myrtle *Myrtus communis*
 Onion *Allium christophii*
 Rock-roses *Helianthemum spp.*
 Sea-hollies *Eryngium spp.*
 Sun-roses *Cistus spp.*
 Winter savoury *Satureia Montana*

Sea Holly. Chris Gibson/Natural England



Ponds and marshes

Water is important for wildlife. Even a small pond or boggy area can attract birds, insects and other animals. It also creates an interesting feature in itself. The Natural England leaflet *Garden ponds and boggy areas: havens for wildlife* has a wealth of advice about creating garden wetlands and selecting suitable plants (see Further information, page 14).

Plants for marshy areas and pond edges

For a wildlife-friendly, natural look, ensure your pond has shallow, sloping edges (to help animals get in and out easily) and plants around the edges to provide cover and interest.

- Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*
- Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*
- Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*
- Lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*
- Marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*
- Marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*
- Ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*
- Water avens *Geum rivale*
- Water forget-me-not

Bogbean. Peter Wakely/Natural England



- Myosotis scorpioides*
- Water mint *Mentha aquatica*
- Water plantain
- Alisma Plantago-aquatica*
- Water violet *Hottonia palustris*
- Small Tortoiseshell. Natural England



Dog rose. Peter Wakely/Natural England



Submerged plants

These plants will help to oxygenate pond water and will also offer cover for secretive pond life.

Curled pondweed

Potamogeton crispus

Other pondweeds *Potamogeton spp.*

Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum*

Spiked water milfoil

Myriophyllum spicatum

Water starwort *Callitriche spp.*

Floating plants

These provide some shade and interest. You need a balance of floating and submerged plants to ensure that some light gets to underwater areas.

Amphibious bistort

Persicaria amphibian

Broad-leaved pondweed

Potamogeton natans

Frogbit. Peter Wakely/Natural England



Teasel. Peter Wakely/Natural England

Fringed waterlily

Nymphoides peltata

Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*

Water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*

Water-lilies: many small cultivars and hybrids may be suitable.

Large Ponds

The following plants are only really suitable for quite substantial ponds, either because they grow tall and will simply look out of place in a small pond, or because they spread rapidly and may take over small areas of water. Some will do both! In the right place, however, they can be superb.

Marginal plants

Flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*

Hemp agrimony

Eupatorium cannabinum

Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*

Purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*

Yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*

Floating plants

White waterlily *Nymphaea alba*

Yellow waterlily *Nuphar lutea*

Invasive plants

The following species are more suited to lakes than ponds. Attractive though they are, they are best avoided in all but the largest areas of water.

Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*

Greater spearwort

Ranunculus lingua

Lesser reedmace *Typha angustifolia*

Warning!

A number of plants can take over your pond and are already damaging our native plants and other wildlife in ponds, lakes and rivers. A particular problem with these plants is that they can be sold under a variety of English names, and in some cases are not correctly identified at all. Watch out for – and avoid – the following:

Australian swamp stonecrop

(also known as New Zealand

pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii*)

Curly waterweed

Lagarosiphon major

Fairy or water fern

Azolla filiculoides

Floating pennywort

Hydrocotyle ranunculoides

Parrot's feather

Myriophyllum aquaticum

If you already have these, get rid of them by composting or burning. Never dispose of them in other ponds or in lakes or rivers as this will spread the problem: they can regenerate even from mere fragments of leaf. Consult the leaflet *Warning – invasive alien pond plants* for more details. This is available from the Natural England Enquiry Service (see Contacts on page 14). The best insurance is to buy only from reputable suppliers. Our Enquiry Service may be able to help you locate one close to you.

Meadow crane's-bill. Peter Rowoth/Natural England



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Plantlife International

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Tel: 01722 342730
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The Wildlife Trusts

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Tel: 01636 677711
www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk

Further information

This is one of a range of wildlife gardening booklets published by Natural England. For more details, contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0845 600 3078 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Natural England also produces *Gardening with wildlife in mind*, an illustrated wildlife reference. Originally on CD but now also available online, *Gardening with wildlife in mind* has detailed information on 800 plants and animal species often found in our gardens, and shows how they are ecologically linked. See www.plantpress.com

Other Titles

There is a vast number of books about all aspects of wildlife gardening. The following list is very selective:

Couzens, D. & Partington, P. *The secret lives of garden birds*. Christopher Helm. 2004.

Moss, S. *The bird-friendly garden*. HarperCollins. 2004.



Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*. Jill Sutcliffe/Natural England

Robinson, P. *RHS water gardening*. Dorling Kindersley. 2003.

Spedding, S. & G. *The natural history of a garden*. Timber Press. 2003.

Bardsley, L. *The wildlife pond handbook*. New Holland. 2003.

Baines, C. *How to make a wildlife garden*. Frances Lincoln Ltd. 2000.