

OCTOBER 2019

Natural Gardens

The best thing about wildlife gardening, is you don't even need to be particularly interested in gardening to create a wildlife haven. You can encourage interesting wildlife into your garden by sowing some wildflowers.

Insects have seen a worrying decline in numbers during the last century. Since 1990, we have seen a 75% decline in biomass of flying insects, so imagine how many have been lost during the intensive farming, widespread hedgerow removal and pesticide use we have seen since the 2nd world war. Our gardens are a valuable resource for insects, as they cover more land than all the nature reserves in Britain.

Many imported or cultivated garden plants will have nectar that adult pollinating insects can drink, but native insect species quite often need native plants for their young to eat, especially the rarer ones. Without this, they cannot breed, and their numbers will continue to decline, which will affect the yield of our crops and so our food security. And it's not just humans that need insect pollinators for food; they are the bottom of the food chain. So by starting at the bottom of this chain by the plants you grow, your garden can become a beacon for lots of wildlife, from predators that control pests like aphids, and birds, bats and hedgehogs too.

Native plants are mostly easy to grow; in fact it's usually controlling them that can be more of a problem. Which is why, if you aren't particularly interested in gardening, I'd say, give wildflowers a go. If they self seed, they might swamp a keen gardeners treasured, delicate plant, but if everything you sow has equal vigour, and you like it, then letting it go wild can be a beautiful thing! Plus it's in fashion too! You only have to glimpse

at a gardening programme to see that top garden designers are embracing the natural look. And if you don't get chance to do much clearing and weeding in your back garden, that's fine too; insects need vegetation and cover to hibernate over winter.

This autumn, the Transition Town Wellington Facebook page will have detailed posts showing how to guides, and plant varieties you can use for different circumstances. You can turn a boring, weedy lawn into a low wildflower meadow, that is still usable for the family and dogs. Or you can fill your borders with either perennial or annual wildflowers. TTW is also developing wildflower meadows throughout the town, so if you don't have a garden of your own, you can still help improve the prospects for our wildlife by joining in with a volunteer team. Keep your eyes peeled for advertising of TTW's community gardening sessions.

written by Helen Gillingham