

# Butterflies & Bees

Whether big or small, our gardens are fast becoming a haven for our butterflies, moths and bees. Many of these species visit gardens in search of nectar, warmth and potential nesting sites. Butterflies, moths and bees are good indicators of a healthy environment, making them a joy to find in the garden.

## Butterflies and Moths

There is a lot you can do to encourage butterflies into your garden - many garden flowers attract them, but they will also feed on fallen fruit and drink from birdbaths or wet stones. Butterflies commonly spotted fluttering around our gardens include the orange-tip, peacock, large white, red admiral and small tortoiseshell. Most moths on the other hand are small and inconspicuous insects, however

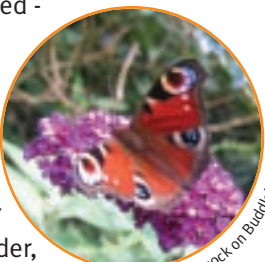
some more colourful day-flying moths include the stunning six-spot burnet and the cinnabar.



Large White

## Planting a Butterfly Border

When planning your garden, you should select a variety of nectar producing plants, which will provide flowers in bloom throughout the season. These will attract and encourage butterflies and moths in to your garden. Butterflies prefer shades of red - with pink, red & purple flowers being most popular. Choose a sunny, sheltered spot for planting your border,



Peacock on Buddleia



Red Admiral

as butterflies need the sun to give them the energy they need to fly and feed.

## Plants for spring nectar include -

primrose, bluebell, blackthorn, honesty, forget-me-not and willow.



Forget-Me-Not

## Plants for summer nectar include -

buddleia (also called the butterfly bush), lavender, common bird's-foot trefoil, ragged robin, teasel, scabious, verbena, thyme.



Ivy

## Plants for autumn nectar include -

fuschia, lavender, ivy, honeysuckle, nasturtium, michaelmas daisy.

## Plants for breeding butterflies

It is also important to provide host plants on which the butterflies and moths can lay their eggs. Some caterpillars are very particular about the type of plants they will eat! Stinging nettles planted in a pot in a sunny spot are suitable for a number of butterfly and moth larvae.

This is because few animals graze on nettles, so they provide better protection for the caterpillars once they hatch. Avoid using pesticides as they can kill caterpillars.



Small Tortoiseshell

## Hibernating Butterflies

Some butterfly species such as the peacock and small tortoiseshell hibernate as adults over the winter. They will use shrubs, garden sheds or garages and log piles.

## Bumblebees

We have several species of bumblebee in Ireland, however many are rare or threatened. Bees fertilize most of our favourite flowers, and pollinate a third of the plants we eat. The first species of bumblebee to emerge in the spring are the buff-tailed (*Bombus terrestris*) and the white-tailed (*Bombus lucorum*) bumblebees.

These species are very similar in appearance, however the buff-tailed are slightly larger and when seen together their stripes appear more orange compared to the lemon of white-tailed bumblebee.



Bumblebee

## A year in the life of a bumblebee colony

1. Early spring - queen bees emerge from hibernation. These are the large bumblebees seen during February & March.
2. The queen looks for a suitable nest site such as an old mouse nest or grassy mound familiarising herself with the area.
3. In the nest the queen lays her eggs, having kept them throughout the winter. The first workers emerge, more eggs are laid and hatch, until the colony reaches approximately 300 bees. Some of these eggs develop into new queen bumblebees.
4. The first unfertilised eggs are laid and these develop into male bumblebees.
5. New queens and males leave the nest and the males look for new queens to mate with.
6. Autumn - the original queen bee, workers and males die. New queens, with their fertilised eggs go into hibernation.

## What to plant for bumblebees

When gardening for bumblebees exotic garden flowers are largely unsuitable, as they either produce little pollen and nectar, or keep it hidden away from the bees. Planting native wildflowers, trees and shrubs is the easiest way to encourage bumblebees to your garden. Bumblebee species differ in the length of their tongues, and as a result prefer different flowers, so it's important to grow a range of different things to provide enough nectar for these busy little creatures!

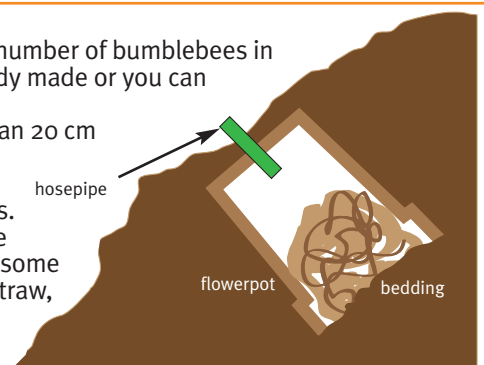


Bumblebee

## Build a Bumblebee Nest

Providing a nest could greatly increase the number of bumblebees in your garden. Nest boxes can be bought ready made or you can produce one fairly cheaply.

Before the end of April, half bury a larger than 20 cm diameter clay flowerpot in a dry, sheltered, sunny flowerbed or hedge bottom so that the drainage hole in the base faces upwards. Attach a short 50-60 mm length of hosepipe (25-30 mm wide) to the drainage hole. Add some bedding such as pets' bedding, dry grass, straw, (not cotton wool.) Cover over the rest of the pot with soil, a slate or tile so that the pipe sticks out. Plant a tall stick upright nearby - bees may use this as a 'marking post' to help them find their way back to the nest.



## Spring plants for bumblebees -

bluebells, dandelion, crocus, primrose, heather, forget-me-not.

## Summer/Autumn plants for bumblebees -

buddleia, ivy, lavender, birds-foot trefoil, fuschia, red valerian, clover, fox glove, snap dragon, mint.



Fuschia

**By trying out some of the things suggested in this guide you will attract fluttering, colourful butterflies and buzzing, furry bumblebees in to your garden. They will help to pollinate your plants and shrubs and give you hours of pleasure watching them go about their business!**

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