

Be sweet
to bees

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LET'S BE SWEET TO BEES

To help prevent bees leaving our cities, turn your garden into a honeypot they can't resist

WHAT can the urban gardener do to help remedy the dramatic decline of the honeybee? One, get yourself a hive, and join the increasing ranks of backyard beekeepers who are finding that the capital's diverse flora – from lime trees to lawn clover – helps produce the most delicious honey. Two – a simpler but equally productive solution – convert your plot to bee-friendly status.

"Urban gardeners, even if they have only a small patch of ground, can offer a greater diversity of plants than vast tracts of countryside where just one or two kinds of crops are grown," says garden designer Sadie May Stowell, who was so moved by the plight of the honeybee that she created a garden at this year's Hampton Court Palace Flower Show to demonstrate which plants best support bees.

"I approached Copella, the Suffolk apple juice company, to sponsor the garden as this is such an issue for them: ultimately, fewer bees result in fewer crops, due to lack of pollination."

A naturalistic garden with organic curves – Stowell was influenced, she says, by the celebrated "waggle dance" helpfully performed by the returning bee to indicate to his pals in which direction food is to be found – the space is enclosed within a native hedge of mixed planting, including hazel, hawthorn and blackthorn.

"Most native hedging is valuable as a food source for honeybees as well as being a wildlife corridor," says Stowell. "And it's more attractive than a fence."

Pattie Barron



The back of the garden has a mini-meadow of wildflowers such as knapweed and ox-eye daisies which, with their simple, single flowers, appeal to the honeybee; its proboscis is shorter than that of the bumblebee, so it can less easily reach pollen and nectar in trickier tubular flowers.

A patch of white clover represents an excellent food source, so Stowell's plea is to let your lawn grow longer so that daisies and clover spring up. "You won't believe how bees will flock to them."

She also pleads that you include a few native flowering trees and shrubs in the garden, as she has done: "The catkins of hazel provide a rich source of pollen in early spring, when little is available.

"Cotoneaster is another fantastic shrub for bees, when in flower. And if you have any ivy, don't cut it back, but let it flower, because it provides a rare, late food source that will enable the bee to stock up for winter."

THE LURE OF COLOURS

Plant a cool blue palette as Stowell has done and you can guarantee, she says, a good turnout from the local bee population; they love blues, mauves and violets as well as white, because they contain ultraviolet, which bees are able to see.

English lavender, vivid blue *Salvia nemerosa*, *Nepeta Six Hills Giant* and *Verbena bonariensis*, with its flat, mauve flower clusters beloved by bees



Blue and purple flowers surround honeycomb seats in the garden for bees



Flat, open blooms – such as these sunflowers – are the flowers honeybees prefer

and butterflies alike, are key players in the Copella Bee Garden, as are cranesbill geraniums Johnson's Blue

and Jolly Bee, named in honour of the honeybees that pollinated the original plant. "Scabious Chile Black provides



Scabious Black Chile, beloved by bees



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a dark accent and has the pincushion heads that honeybees love to work. I also included *Phacelia tanacetifolia*, best known as a green manure, but it is a great food source for bees. Just sow a little patch in any bare spot – anyone can grow it," says Stowell.

She also included one of the most beautiful annuals, dramatic purple *Cerinth* the major *Purpurascens*.

She says: "Bumblebees love *cerinth* because their probosces can reach into the hooded flowers. But crafty honeybees get in on the act, too, stealing the pollen and nectar by biting into the back of the flower."

GET YOUR GARDEN BUZZING

- **Bring in the designer:** sadiemay.co.uk; 07813 338632.
- **Leave some herbs to flower:** thyme, hyssop, oregano, mint and sage.
- **Sow single-flowered annuals** such as sunflowers and *Ammi majus*.
- **For a complete plant list** from the Copella Bee Garden, plus more bee tips, visit copellafruitjuices.co.uk.
- **Take a beekeeping taster course** with Urban Bees. Next one is on September 26, 11am to 4pm, £45, in Battersea SW11; to sign up, see urbanbees.co.uk.
- **Get a starter kit:** of beesuit, Beehaus hive and bees from omlet.co.uk.
- **Find honeycomb garden furniture** at Blandford Home and Garden, blandfordsobroadway.com.

SEE IT BUY IT

BUY IT: GLASS WATERING BALL

The prettiest glass ball not only decorates a container display, it will keep the plants freshly watered for up to 10 days. Lakeland's colourful glass watering ball slowly drip-feeds water into the compost, making it a great way to keep favourite plants watered while you are on holiday. Each glass ball measures 8.5cm in diameter, and holds 300ml water. A pack of two costs £5.99 plus £4.25 from lakeland.co.uk; 015394 88100

Drip-feed plants while you're away



SEE IT: SUMMER FUN AT BORDE HILL

Borde Hill Garden, Haywards Heath, is renowned for its magnificent grounds, parkland and formal Grade II-listed Heritage Garden, but also has a summer season devoted to children's activities, including a new adventure playground.

Kids' Summer Fun season starts July 26 and runs until August 27, and includes go-kart parties, arts and crafts workshops and a magician. Families can enjoy the maze, tree trails and a lakeside picnic. For more details, visit bordehill.co.uk.

Borde Hill has go-kart fun for kids



SEE IT: FUCHSIA FESTIVAL

Capel Manor Gardens, Enfield, is holding its annual fuchsia show together with the Enfield and District Fuchsia Society on July 24 from 1pm to 5pm, and on July 25 from 10am to 5pm. Fuchsia growers will be on hand to offer growing tips and there will be plant sales and talks, as well as guided garden walks at 1pm on both days. Entry £5.50 adults; family ticket £13.50.

DON'T MISS

Keep up-to-date with all the gardening news by following Pattie Barron's blog at homesandproperty.co.uk/blogs