

Bumblebee Aware April 2019

It really is now time to sow the seeds in all of those packets that we could not resist buying in recent months. The daylight is getting longer and it has to be getting warmer with the result that all of the self-sown wild-flowers from last year are growing strongly and we need to start the next wave of plants if we have not yet done so. This is the month when the **Wild About Gardens Award (WAGA)** scheme is encouraging us all to get involved.

Bumblebees and other pollinators like to concentrate their foraging on rich clumps of blooms rather than going for the pick-and-mix sort of option offered by small wild-flower meadows, because they are really busy and have to keep focussed. They need simple flowers with open faces like Sunflowers where the nectar is accessible and not hidden behind folds of ornate petals. They prefer plants with several flowers on each stalk, like



Foxgloves. They also rely on a succession of different plants flowering throughout the year in each of Maidenhead's gardens.



Some of the most beneficial garden flowers, and the easiest to grow from seed are, Cornflower, Malva, Scabious, Nasturtium, Vipers bugloss, Pulmonaria, Californian poppy, Geranium (but not Pelargonium), Lupin, Echinacea, Delphinium, Wallflower, Borage, and Gaillardia. If you have a bit more



space then sow some wild flowers like Red campion, Bugle, White dead nettle, White clover, Yellow archangel, Toadflax, Comfrey, Purple loosestrife, Field poppy, Purple knapweed, Wild marjoram, Primrose, Cowslip and Ragged robin. There are masses to choose from and you can buy



many of these as small plants from the Garden Centres already. If you buy a few this year, you will be able to collect the seed in the Autumn and let them produce a crop for you next year. (Being part of the **WAGA** scheme is not 'just for Christmas'!)

Pollinators love members of the bean family from Clovers at one end to Runner beans and Peas at the other and so sowing these varieties will be helpful. Whatever you see growing in your garden or in the local area, look to see if the bees are visiting it. Some varieties of plant that carry the "Perfect for pollinators" or "Bee friendly" labels are ignored by bees so you cannot rely totally on the symbols on the seed packet. The bumblebees know best! (It came as a shock to me to learn that some varieties of popular plants, like Sunflower, are even bred in a variety that lacks pollen because the flower-arrangers prefer them like that!)

If you have any questions about bumblebees, you can always email me on: buzz@bumblebee.myzen.co.uk and I will do my best to answer them.

Adrian Doble (15 April 2019) (Member and volunteer with Bumblebee Conservation Trust)