



South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Planting a Wild Garden

Fact Sheet no. 30

All beekeepers should be aware of their surroundings. Knowing and understanding your local flora can be a distinct advantage to the beekeeper. Not only will it add to their enjoyment it will also help to identify what crop the bees are collecting. Every beekeeper should help to maintain and restore our wild flora. Select an area in your garden or better still on the farm and plant it with wild native plants. These plants will not only benefit our bees but also the bumble and solitary bees, our butterflies and numerous birds and mammals. As beekeepers we should always consider nature and how we can help. Over the last 40 years the amount of flora and fauna which is now extinct from certain areas is one of the crying shames of modern farming where herbicides and mono culture is the norm. Added to that cocktail is pesticides, fungicides and fertilisers.. The good news is that we have the means of recreating these wild areas by constructing our own wild life garden which will attract some of those almost extinct insects. Wild gardens and meadows are an ever increasing feature of the modern garden because of the great awareness of a need to return to Mother Nature's way. The choice of plants is unlimited. It's a personal choice. What ever you plant remember it should help all of nature's creatures. Some plants will have leaves that attract feeding insects and mammals. The leaves of the common nettle is a feeding ground for caterpillars of the Red Admiral and Peacock butterfly. That beautiful black and red caterpillar of the cinnabar feeds on ragwort and indeed is used in Canada as an organic means of eradicating this very invasive weed. Although most flowering plants are chosen for the actual colour of the flower don't forgot about the value of the seeds to our birds and mammals. The finch family such as the Goldfinch can be enticed into your garden if seeds are readily available. You can provide them in the bird feeders but a more natural way is by plants such as the Teasel and let it go to seed providing instant feeding for the birds. The flower of the Teasel also attracts the bumble bee and the butterfly especially the Peacocks. They also like the seeds of cornflower, a plant that provides us with a beautiful blue flower much loved by the bees. The Lesser Stitchwort with its beautiful white flowers can be found in our ditches from May onwards. Not often visited by our honey bee but very attractive to other insects. Another delicate looking flower is Lady's Smock, a small mauve colored flower. You can still see meadows of this plant, a real beauty much loved b some of the butterflies on which they lay their eggs. If you want a deeper color why not include Field Scabious often seen in waste ground and on the road margins. The flower is a blue but the pollen collected is a bright orange. Flowering period is usually Sept. – October time. The Red Campion considered by many to be a weed produces a pink flower head much visited by insect life. The leaves are also attractive. If you want a splash of color the Poppy is an obvious choice. There are many colors. Our honey bees as do the bumble bee visit them for pollen. The Lesser Celandine reputed to be poisonous to the bees is occasionally visited for pollen. Flowers on the sunny side of the ditch are particularly attractive to the forager. Maybe in time of dearth collecting a small amount won't harm the bees. The Ragged Robin is a beautiful 60 cm high plant with a delicate looking stem and equally frail looking flowers whose nectar can only be extracted by a long proboscis insect not one for the honey bee.. This plant is ideal for a damp garden. The pink flower of the Red Valerian is easy to grow. It can be seen on dry walls and ditches. Again only insects with a long proboscis can extract the nectar. Remember most of the annuals that you grow in the flower border, hanging baskets and window boxes come originally from its wild cousins the verbenia is one such plant. Why not try the wild variety this year much loved by bees and butterflies where as the "cultivated" variety is never attractive to our insects. The Phacelia, which is grown as a catch crop is a plant that becomes alive with bee as they search through the blue flowers collecting beautiful blue pollen.

Only now most beekeepers are discovering the value of this plant. It will reseed itself every year. It's a great plant if you want to study your bees collecting pollen. Remember the list is endless. The important point is to make a start. When you plant inspect the area every week and any plant that seems to be invasive or overpowering just remove them.

Also check out "Irish Seed Savers" in Co. Clare or visit "Chiltern Seeds" or "Sutton Seeds" on the web.

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Plant name	Yield	Notes
Phacelia	Blue pollen loved by bees	Easy to grow from seed
Dandelion	Orange Pollen, nectar love by bees	Widespread
Herb Robert	Visited by Bumble bees	Small pink flower
Greater Knapweed	Nectar and Pollen	Pink flower easy grow.
Rosebay Willow herb	Nectar and Pollen	Not for the garden invasive
Purple Loosestrife	Nectar and Pollen for bees and butterflies	Purple flower damp soil
Red dead-nettle	Visited by many insects	Small plant deep purple flower
Common Mallow	Nectar and Pollen for bees	
Evening Primrose	Nectar pollen flower is yellow	Easy grow self seed
Fox glove	Loved by bumble bees	Pink flower easy grow adds height to garden
Blue Bell	Nectar and pollen	
Poppy	Pollen for bees	Self seeding
Cornflower	Nectar and Pollen for bees and butterflies. Seeds for birds	Easy to grow beautiful flowers
Meadow Cranebill	Visited by solitary bees, butter flies	Easy to grow blue flower from the geranium family.
Himalyan Balsam	Great autumn crop nectar, white pollen	Considered a very invasive weed on river banks
Meadow sweet	Green pollen	Include in garden
Borage	Great source of nectar	Light blue flower easy grown
Grape-hyacinth	White Pollen collected by bees	Grows from bulbs underneath light shade
Wallflower	Pollen and nectar worked well by bees	Easy to grow will reseed.
Charlock	Pollen and nectar	Yellow flower
Mustard	Pollen and Nectar for bees	Grown as catch crop