

# GARDENING FOR BATS



All sixteen species of bats in the UK eat insects, and need a good supply of these from spring through to the autumn. By growing flowers attractive to a range of insects, our gardens can become important feeding stations for bats, birds and other wildlife.

## **Many plants depend on insects**

We grow flowers in our gardens for our own enjoyment. But colour and perfume are really the plants' way of advertising themselves to insects. Sweet nectar and protein-rich pollen are bait to encourage insects to visit. In return, pollen is carried from one flower to another on their bodies so the flowers are fertilised.

## **Bats need insects**

Flying uses a lot of energy, so bats have huge appetites. All our UK bats eat insects. Five species, including the long-eared bat, prefer moths, but most bats rely more heavily on flies as food than any other insect group. Especially important are craneflies, and a range of midge families and their relatives. Pipistrelles, the bats most likely to visit your garden, depend on catching very large numbers of tiny insects, some of which are pests.

## **Flower shape and insect tongues**

Flowers with long narrow petal tubes, such as evening primrose and honeysuckle, are visited by moths and butterflies. Only their long tongues can reach deep down to the hidden nectar. Short-tongued insects include many families of flies and some moths. They can only reach nectar in flowers with short florets. By planting a mixture of flowering plants, vegetables, trees and shrubs, you can encourage a diversity of insects to drop in and refuel.

## **Follow these general rules**

- ? Plant flowers varying not only in colour and fragrance, but also in shape.
- ? Daisies and daisy-like flowers are open with a mass of shallow florets.
- ? Pale flowers are more easily seen in poor light.
- ? Single flowers have more nectar than double varieties
- ? Native wild flowers or those closely related are most useful
- ? Flowers with landing platforms and short florets such as daisy or carrot family attract many insects.
- ? Many flowering vegetables such as beans and courgettes are also good for insects.

## **Plant trees and shrubs**

These are important in providing

- food for insect larvae
- food for adult insects
- shelter for flying insects

- roosting opportunities for bats.

In a small garden, choose trees that can be coppiced – cut down to the ground every few years - to allow new shoots to spring from the base. Young shoots and leaves will support leaf-eating insects, even if they do not produce flowers. Hawthorn and elder are useful small trees.

## **Create a wet area**

A pond, a marshy area, even a half-tub made into a mini-pond can attract insects. Many of the tiny flies favoured by bats start life in water as aquatic larvae.

## **Say NO to insecticides**

Chemical pesticides kill natural predators and so may do more harm than good. They reduce bats' insect prey, and surviving insects carry traces of poison.

## **Encourage natural predators**

Hoverflies, wasps, ladybirds, lacewings, ground beetles and centipedes are the gardener's friends. As natural predators they help keep the balance, eating many pests.

- ? Allow some weeds to grow to provide ground cover for natural predators
- ? Grow favourites of hoverflies and other predators close to the flowers and vegetables that tend to become infested.
- ? Leave hollow-stemmed plants to overwinter as shelter for ladybirds.
- ? Leave heaps of dead leaves and brushwood undisturbed for hedgehogs.
- ? Most garden birds are effective predators. Provide them with regular food and water.

## **Prevent a CATastrophe**

Many bats and other small mammals fall prey to Britain's most dangerous four-legged predator, the domestic cat. Cats do not need to stay out all night. Bring your cat in an hour before sunset so bats can emerge undisturbed.

*(Send for our special leaflet on cats and bats.)*

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## Gardening for bats

Aim at having flowers in bloom through the year, including both annuals and herbaceous perennials.

Below are some suggestions, but this is by no means an exhaustive list. See what grows well in YOUR garden, and what seems most attractive to insects.

Flowering times are approximate, varying in different areas. Regular dead-heading extends flowering period in many flowers. A=annual, HA=hardy annual, HHA=half-hardy annual, P=perennial, W=wild flower,

Flowers for borders			
St John's Wort	<i>Hypericum</i>	P	March-
marigolds	<i>Calendula</i>	H/A	March – Oct.
aubretia	<i>a. deltoidea</i>	P	March-June
honesty	<i>Lunaria rediva</i>	HB	March
forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis sp.</i>	A/P	March - May
elephant ears	<i>Bergenia</i>	P	April
Wallflowers	<i>Erysimum</i>	B	April - June
Cranesbills	<i>Geranium sp</i>	P	May – Sept.
Yarrow	<i>Achillea</i>	P	May -
Poppies	<i>Papaver sp.</i>	A	May - July
Dames violet	<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>	P	May - August
Red Valerian	<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	P	May – Sept.
Poached egg plant	<i>Limnanthes</i>	HA	June – Aug.
Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	P	June- Sept.
Phacelia		HA	June – Sept.
Ox-eye daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	P	June – Aug.
Evening primrose	<i>Oenothera biennis</i>	B	June-Sept.
Candytuft	<i>Iberis umbellata</i>	HA	June – Sept.
Sweet William	<i>Dianthus barbatus</i>	B	June - July
Blanket flowers	<i>Gaillardia</i>	P	June -
Verbena	<i>V.bonariensis</i>	HHA	June – Oct.
Scabious	<i>knautia arvensis</i>	P	July-Aug.
Night-scented stock	<i>mattiola bicornia</i>	HA	July-Aug
Pincushion flower	<i>Scabious sp.</i>	A/P	July – Sept.
Cherry pie	<i>heliotrope</i>	HHA	July – Oct.
Mexican aster	<i>Cosmos sp.</i>	A/P	July – Oct.
Cone flower	<i>Rudbeckia sp.</i>	A/P	August-Nov.
Mallow	<i>lavatera sp.</i>	P	August-Oct.
Michaelmas daisy	<i>Aster sp.</i>	P	August-Sept.
Ice plant 'Pink lady'	<i>Sedum spectabile</i>	P	Sept.
Herbs – both leaves and flowers are fragrant			
Fennel	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>		July – Sept.
Bergamot	<i>Monarda didyma</i>		June - Sept
Sweet Cicely	<i>Myrrhis odorata</i>		April - June
Hyssop	<i>Hyssopus officianlis</i>		July - Sept
Feverfew	<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i>		June – Sept.
Borage	<i>Borago officinalis</i>		May – Sept.

Rosemary	<i>Rosemary officinalis</i>	March - May
Lemon balm	<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	
Coriander	<i>Coprianrum sativum</i>	June - August
Lavenders	<i>Lavendula sp.</i>	
Marjoram	<i>Origanum sp</i>	

### Trees, shrubs and climbers important to insects

Oak	<i>Quercus sp.</i>	large gardens only
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>	
Common alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Suitable for coppicing
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Suitable for coppicing
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Small
Pussy willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>	Suitable for coppicing
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Suitable for coppicing
Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera sp.</i>	grow a variety for succession.
Dog rose	<i>Rosa canina</i>	Climber
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	Climber
Ivy	<i>hedera helix</i>	Climber
Buddleia	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>	shrub
Guelder rose	<i>Vibernum opulus</i>	shrub
Gorse	<i>Ulex sp.</i>	shrub

### Plants for pond edges and marshy areas

Purple loosestrife	<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	W	June – Aug.
Meadow sweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	W	June – Sept.
Lady's smock	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	W	April - June
Water mint	<i>mentha aquatica</i>	W	July – Sept.
Angelica	<i>Angellica sylvestris</i>	W	July – Sept
Hemp agrimony	<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	W	July – Sept.
Marsh marigold	<i>Caltha palustris</i>	W	March – May
Creeping Jenny	<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i>	W	May - August
Fringed water lily	<i>Nymphoides peltata</i>	W	June – Sept.
Water forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis scorpioides</i>	W	June – Sept.

Allow part of your lawn to grow long in summer and cut in autumn, removing the clippings. Avoid using fertilizers.

Compost heaps are good producers of insects too.

*Add a seat to watch your garden come to life!*