



Plants for wildlife-friendly gardens



working towards Natural England
for people, places and nature

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This leaflet lists some of the many garden plants which can help to attract wildlife to your garden. While plants that occur naturally in England – native species – do have more to offer some forms of wildlife, recent research has seriously challenged the once-conventional view that the native flora are always best. It is certainly now clear that many cultivated varieties and exotic plants are also good for wildlife, provided that their flowers are not too complex. For example, highly-bred double-flowered varieties produce little or no pollen or nectar and so are not of interest to bees, butterflies or other pollinating insects.

Garden plants should **never** be planted out in the wild and, similarly, wild plants should **never** be dug up to be planted in the garden. Digging up wild plants is illegal. It is also usually pointless as many will only thrive on poor soils and will not flourish in gardens.

Introducing cultivated plants into the wild has caused severe problems for native wildflowers – and their associated wildlife – and is still doing so. Rhododendron now smothers huge areas of woodland in England (and Wales) and is extremely hard – and expensive – to control. Similarly, the fleshy-leaved Hottentot fig *Carpobrotus edulis* has invaded cliffs in Devon and Cornwall where it forms dense stands, out-competing native species and even changing the composition of the soil. Various introduced aquatic plants have caused even greater havoc and it has so far proved impossible even to prevent their further and highly damaging spread.

Do take great care therefore and never risk introducing garden plants into wild areas. Discarding the results of weeding over the garden fence – for example into adjoining allotments, woodland, railway land or wasteland – is irresponsible. All unwanted plant material should instead be composted. The English Nature booklet *Composting and peat-free gardening* has further details. (See the end of this leaflet.)



Trees and shrubs

Large trees

Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*
Beech *Fagus sylvatica*
Cherries *Prunus avium* and *P. padus*
Elm *Ulmus procera*
Oaks *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea*
Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*
White willow *Salix alba*

Medium/small trees

Alder *Alnus glutinosa*
Apples *Malus* spp.
Field maple *Acer campestre*
Holly *Ilex aquifolium*
Pears *Pyrus* spp.
Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*
Silver birch *Betula pendula*
Yew *Taxus baccata*

Plants for hedges

A combination of shrubs and climbers can make attractive hedges of great benefit for wildlife, as well as providing a functional boundary. Beech and holly can also be effective when used to make single species hedges.

Shrubs suitable for hedges

Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*
Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*
Cherry plum *Prunus cerasifera*
Elder *Sambucus nigra*
Guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*
Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*
Hazel *Corylus avellana*
Privets, including wild privet
Ligustrum vulgare



Honeysuckle flower. Derek Ratcliffe/English Nature

Climbers and 'scramblers'

Climbing brambles *Rubus* spp. *fruticosus* group (including various cultivars and hybrids, eg loganberries, tayberries etc)
Climbing roses *Rosa* spp. especially wild species such as dog rose *R. canina* and field rose *R. arvensis*
Ivies *Hedera* spp., including common ivy *H. helix*
Honeysuckles *Lonicera* spp., including the native *L. periclymenum*
Wild clematis/Old man's beard
Clematis vitalba

Plants to site under trees or in shady areas

The following species flower early before trees are in full leaf and will do well in areas that become shady later in the year.

Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

Bugle *Ajuga reptans*

Daffodils including Wild daffodil

Narcissus pseudonarcissus

Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*

Ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*

Lily of the valley *Convallaria majalis*

Lords-and-ladies/cuckoopint

Arum maculatum

Primrose *Primula vulgaris*

Sweet violet *Viola odorata*

Wood avens *Geum urbanum*

Yellow archangel

Lamium maculatum



Foxglove. Peter Wakely/English Nature

Other shrubs for nectar, pollen or fruits

These plants are especially attractive to insects or provide food for birds and other animals.



Several bird species are fond of the firethorn berries and blackbirds may nest in this shrub. *Pyracantha augustifolia*. Chris Gibson/English Nature

Bodnant viburnum

Viburnum x bodnantense

Californian lilac *Ceanothus* spp.

Creeping cotoneaster

Cotoneaster frigidus

Firethorn *Pyracantha* spp.

Himalayan honeysuckle

Leycesteria formosa

Japanese quince *Chaenomeles japonica*

Laurustinus *Viburnum tinus*

Lilac *Syringa vulgaris*

Mahonia *Mahonia* spp.

Mock orange *Philadelphus* spp.

Serviceberry *Amelanchier canadensis*

Warning Some species of cotoneaster (eg *C. horizontalis*) are invasive and not recommended

Wildflowers

Native wildflowers for borders

NOTE

Any native plant with a simple, open-structured flower is likely to attract pollinating insects, and single-flowered members of the huge daisy (Compositae) or cabbage (Crucifers) families and all members of the carrot family (Umbellifers) are especially so. In addition, members of the huge family of Labiates which includes mints and deadnettles are also recommended.

The following list is therefore just indicative of the huge variety of wildflowers you could plant in your garden.

Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*
Chicory *Chichorium intybus*
Chives *Allium schoenoprasum*
Common mallow *Malva sylvestris*
Common poppy *Papaver rhoeas*
Corncockle *Agrostemma githago*
Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*
Corn marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum*
Cowslip *Primula veris*
Dame's-violet *Hesperis matronalis*
Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*
Devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*
Field scabious *Knautia arvensis*
Foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*
Germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*
Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea*
Great mullein *Verbascum thapsus*
Greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*
Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*

Herb-robert *Geranium robertianum*
Lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*
Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*
Meadow cranesbill *Geranium pratense*
Oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*
Primrose *Primula vulgaris*
Red campion *Silene dioica*
Spiked speedwell *Veronica spicata*
Tansy *Tanacetum vulgare*
Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*
Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*
White campion *Silene alba*
Wild thyme *Thymus drucei*
Yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*



Wild thyme. Peter Wakely/English Nature

Cultivated plants for borders

Grecian windflower *Anemone blanda*
Angelica *Angelica archangelica*
Aubretia *Aubretia deltoidea*
California poppy
Eschscholtzia californica
Candytuft *Iberis sempervirens*
Christmas rose *Helleborus niger*
Cosmos *Cosmos bipinnatus*
Evening primrose *Oenothera biennis*
Fleabane *Erigeron* spp.
Forget-me-not *Myosotis* spp.
French marigold *Tagetes* spp.
Globe thistle *Echinops ritro*
Grape hyacinth *Muscari botryoides*
Hollyhock *Althaea rosea*
Honesty *Lunaria rediviva*
Ice plant *Sedum spectabile*
Lenten rose *Helleborus orientalis*

Michaelmas daisy *Aster* spp.
Perennial cornflower *Centaurea montana*
Perennial sunflower
Helianthus decapetalus
Phlox *Phlox paniculata*
Poached-egg plant *Limnanthes douglasii*
Purple coneflower *Echinacea purpurea*
Red valerian *Centranthus ruber*
Snapdragon *Antirrhinum majus*
Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis*
Spring crocus *Crocus chrysanthus*
and hybrids
Sweet alyssum *Lobularia maritima*
Sweet bergamot *Monarda didyma*
Sweet William *Dianthus barbatus*
Tobacco plant *Nicotiana affinis*
Wallflower *Cheiranthus cheiri*
White arabis (single) *Arabis alpina*
Winter aconite *Eranthis hyemalis*
Yellow alyssum *Alyssum saxatile*

The poached-egg plant may attract various species of hoverfly. Chris Gibson/English Nature



Ponds and marshes

Water is important for wildlife. Even a small pond or boggy area can attract birds, insects and other animals. It also creates an interesting feature in itself. The English Nature leaflet *Garden ponds and boggy areas: havens for wildlife* (see end of this leaflet) has a wealth of advice about creating garden wetlands and selecting suitable plants.

Plants for marshy areas and pond edges

For a wildlife-friendly, natural look, ensure your pond has shallow, sloping edges (to help animals get in and out easily) and plants around the edges to provide cover and interest.

Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*
Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*
Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*
Lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*
Marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*
Marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*
Ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*
Water avens *Geum rivale*
Water forget-me-not
Myosotis scorpioides
Water mint *Mentha aquatica*
Water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*
Water violet *Hottonia palustris*

Submerged plants

These plants will help to oxygenate pond water and will also offer cover for secretive pond life

Curled pondweed *Potamogeton crispus*
Other pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp.
Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum*
Spiked water milfoil
Myriophyllum spicatum
Water starwort *Callitriche* spp.



Bogbean. Peter Wakely/English Nature

Floating plants

These provide some shade and interest. You need a balance of floating and submerged plants to ensure that some light gets to underwater areas.

Amphibious bistort *Persicaria amphibia*
Broad-leaved pondweed
Potamogeton natans
Fringed waterlily *Nymphoides peltata*
Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*
Water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*
Water-lilies. Many small cultivars and hybrids may be suitable.

Large ponds

The following plants are only really suitable for quite substantial ponds either because they grow tall and will simply look out of place in a small pond or because they spread rapidly and may take over small areas of water. Some will do both! In the right place, however, they can be superb.

Marginal plants

Flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*
Hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*
Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*
Purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*
Yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*

Floating plants

White waterlily *Nymphaea alba*
Yellow waterlily *Nuphar lutea*

Invasive plants

The following species are more suited to lakes than ponds. Attractive though they are, they are best avoided in all but the largest areas of water.

Bur-reed
Sparganium erectum
Greater spearwort
Ranunculus lingua
Lesser reedmace
Typha angustifolia

Drought-tolerant plants

Climate change is now a reality. Some parts of England in recent years have received a lower level of annual rainfall than Jerusalem while spring and summer hosepipe bans may become a regular feature in the east and southeast at least. It makes sense, therefore, to select plants which, once established, can withstand long periods without being watered. Many of the following species originate from South America, the Mediterranean or the Middle East and are well-suited to dry soils in full sun, as well as providing for the needs of garden wildlife.

Butterflies like this small tortoiseshell (below) Chris Gibson/English Nature) are drawn to various species of sea-holly *Eryngium maritimum* (right).
Chris Gibson/English Nature





Argentinean salvia *Salvia argentea*
 Calamint
Calamintha nepeta ssp. *nepeta*
 Cardoon *Cynara cardunculus*
 Chile black scabious
Scabiosa atropurpurea
 Crimson clover *Trifolium incarnatum*
 Crocus *Crocus tommasinianus*
 Escallonia *Escallonia* spp.
 False dittany *Ballota acetabulosa*
 Giant dead-nettle *Lamium orvala*
 Giant echium *Echium pininana*
 Giant scabious *Cephalaria gigantea*
 Golden-drops *Onosma* spp.

Honeywort
Cerithe major and *C. purpurascens*
 Honey garlic *Nectaroscordium siculum*
 Lamb's lugs (or ears)
Stachys olympica; and *Stachys lanata*
 Jerusalem sage *Phlomis russelliana*
 Marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and its
 garden form 'Aureum', golden marjoram
 Myrtle *Myrtus communis*
 Onion *Allium christophii*
 Rock-roses *Helianthemum* spp.
 Sea-hollies *Eryngium* spp.
 Sun-roses *Cistus* spp.
 Winter savoury *Satureia montana*

Warning

A number of plants can take over your pond and are already damaging our native plants and other wildlife in ponds, lakes and rivers. A particular problem with these plants is that they can be sold under a variety of English names, and in some cases are not correctly identified at all. Watch out for – and avoid – the following:

Australian swamp stonecrop
(also known as New Zealand
pygmyweed *Crassula helmsii*)
Curly waterweed
Lagarosiphon major
Fairy or water fern
Azolla filiculoides
Floating pennywort
Hydrocotyle ranunculoides
Parrot's feather
Myriophyllum aquaticum

If you already have these, get rid of them by composting or burning. **Never** dispose of them in other ponds or in lakes or rivers as this will spread the problem: they can regenerate even from mere fragments of leaf. See the leaflet *Warning – invasive alien pond plants* for more details. This is available from the English Nature Enquiry Service (01733 455100/101/102)

The best insurance is to buy only from reputable suppliers. Our Enquiry Service may be able to help you locate one close to you.

Finding out more

There is now a vast number of books about all aspects of wildlife gardening. The following list is very selective.

Baines, C. 2000. *How to make a wildlife garden*. Frances Lincoln Ltd
Bardsley, L. 2003. *The wildlife pond handbook*. New Holland, London
Couzens, D., & Partington, P. 2004. *The secret lives of garden birds*. London: Christopher Helm.
Moss, S. 2004. *The bird-friendly garden*. London: Harper Collins
Robinson, P. 2003. *RHS water gardening*. Dorling Kindersley
Spedding, S., & G. 2003. *The natural history of a garden*. Timber Press



Cornflower *Centaurea cyanus*. Jill Sutcliffe/English Nature

Useful organisations

Flora Locale

National Office, Projects Administrator
Denford Manor, Hungerford
Berkshire, RG17 0UN
Tel: 01488 680 458
info@floralocale.org
www.floralocale.org

Northern England Office,
North England Project Officer
Northern Office, Council Offices
King Street
Pateley Bridge, HG3 5LE
Tel: 01423 712 946

Plantlife

14 Rollestone Street
Salisbury, SP1 1DX
www.plantlife.org.uk

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

The Lodge
Sandy
Beds, SG19 2DL
Tel: 01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk

The Wildlife Trusts

The Kiln
Waterside
Mather Road
Newark
NG24 1WT
Tel: 01636 677711
www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk

This English Nature leaflet is one of a series about gardening with wildlife in mind. The others are: *Wildlife-friendly gardening: a general guide*; *Amphibians in your garden*; *Reptiles in your garden*; *Minibeasts in your garden*; *Focus on bats*; *Composting and peat-free gardening*; *Meadows – how to create one in your garden*; *Garden pond and boggy areas: havens for wildlife*; *Dragonflies and damselflies in your garden*; *Enjoying moths and butterflies in your garden*; *Mammals in your garden*; *Wildlife on allotments*; *Birds and your garden*.
In preparation: *Living roofs*; *Another kingdom: fungi in your garden*; *Green gems: mosses and liverworts in your garden*; *How does your garden grow? Children and wildlife*.

All leaflets are freely available from the English Nature Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or e-mail enquiries@english-nature.org.uk. The Enquiry Service can also provide a list of reputable suppliers of pond plants.

English Nature also produces an interactive CD: *Gardening with wildlife in mind*. This has detailed texts and photos of 500 plants and 300 of the more common garden ‘creatures’, and shows how they are ecologically linked. Details from The Plant Press, 10 Market Street, Lewes, BN7 2NB. Alternatively, call John Stockdale on 01273 476151 or e-mail john@plantpress.com



English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency. Working in partnership to conserve and enhance our landscapes and natural environment, to promote countryside access and recreation as well as public well-being, now and for future generations.

This is one of a range of publications published by:
External Relations Team
English Nature
Northminster House
Peterborough PE1 1UA

www.english-nature.org.uk

© English Nature 2006

Printed on Evolution Satin,
75% recycled post-consumer
waste paper, elemental
chlorine free.

ISBN 1 85716

Catalogue code IN18.7

Designed and printed by
statusdesign.co.uk,
7.5M

Front cover photographs:
Top left: Cowslips.
Paul Glendell/English Nature
Bottom left: Rowan berries.
Peter Roworth/English Nature
Main: Wildflower garden.
Jill Sutcliffe/English Nature



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