

How to: Choose pollinator plants for late Summer and Autumn



Photo: jeffreyw via Wikimedia Commons



Photo: Stanze from Germany, via Wikimedia Commons

During autumn, as many British wildflowers wind up their flowering season, it is especially important to provide nectar for pollinator species in the garden. Butterflies and queen bumblebees will be preparing to enter their hibernation/dormancy phase over the winter and need to fill their tanks with sugar to tide them over.

There is a broad range of plants which are in flower during this season, so ensure that you are planting a range of flowers which will support diverse pollinator species. Combine this guide with the 'Winter and Early Spring' and 'Late Spring and Summer' guides to ensure you are planting a mix of species in your garden which flower throughout the year; this can be achieved whatever sized space you have!

Target species:

Many different species of pollinator remain active throughout late Summer and Autumn, particularly some bees, butterflies and hoverflies.

How easy is it to do?

Very easy/easy.

How much will it cost?

Can be inexpensive; seeds cost little but putting in a lot of garden centre plants can be pricey. You may be able to swap plants with your friends.

How effective is it for the target species?

Very effective.

What species to plant

Here is our list of late summer and autumn flowering plants, listed in order of 'wildlife score', an index measuring how many experts think they are useful to how many different groups of pollinators, with the best at the top. Native (and long established) species are shown in **bold** if you want to encourage wildflowers in your garden.

Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>	All groups
Ice plant	<i>Hylotelephium spectabile</i>	All groups
Field scabious	<i>Knautia arvensis</i>	All groups
Perennial wallflower	<i>Erysimum Bowles Mauve</i>	Bees, butterflies
Hemp agrimony	<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	All groups
Giant hyssop	<i>Agastache</i> spp	Bees, butterflies
Globe thistle	<i>Echinops</i> spp	Bees
Devil's-bit scabious	<i>Succisia pratensis</i>	All groups
Red valerian	<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	All groups
Sneezewort	<i>Helenium</i> spp	Bees, hoverflies
Hyssop	<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>	All groups
White dead-nettle	<i>Lamium album</i>	Bees
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i>	All groups
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago</i> spp	Bees, hoverflies
Buddleja	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	All groups
Lesser calamint	<i>Calamintha nepeta</i>	Bees, butterflies
Rosebay willowherb	<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	Bees, hoverflies
Sage	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	Bees
Michaelmas daisy	<i>Symphotrichum novae-angliae</i> <i>cultivars, Aster</i> spp	All groups
Heather/ Ling	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Bees, hoverflies
Rose	<i>Rosa</i> (garden singles)	Bees
Purple top	<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>	Bees, butterflies
Autumn crocuses	<i>Crocus sativus, C. speciosus,</i> <i>Colchicum autumnale.</i>	Bees
Cardoon / globe artichoke	<i>Cynara cardunculus</i>	Bees
Fuchsia	<i>Fuchsia magellanica</i>	Bees, butterflies
Mouse-ear hawkweed	<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>	Bees, hoverflies

Golden rules – what the science tells us

The three broad groups of pollinators you will be looking to provide for in these months (bees, hoverflies and butterflies) all feed rather differently, so it will be important to provide a suitable range of plants which cater to each of their needs.

- Butterflies have long tongues and mouth parts (proboscis), so choose tubular flowers to feed from, such as Red valerian and Buddleja.
- Hoverflies, on the other hand, have no tongue, so must rely on flower shapes which allow easier access to nectar, species such as Michaelmas daises and Hemp agrimony.
- Bees are somewhere in between; their tongue is not as long as that of butterflies, but they are capable of feeding on both tubular and flat flowers.
- While all these species flower in late Summer and Autumn, it is important to consider which species will encourage which Autumn-active pollinators, and ensure you are planting a selection in your space. Finally, wasps may also be active late into the Summer- and be aware that Autumn is the time that they are most likely to sting!

What to look for?

You may see many different species of pollinator active during this season. Young queen bumblebees will be on the wing during Autumn, searching for a new site to hibernate; make sure to look out for them! Honeybees are also a common site in the late Summer and Autumn months, particularly on warmer days. Some butterfly species and hoverflies are also very common during this season.

Further information

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [winter & early spring](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_winter.pdf) www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_winter.pdf

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [late spring & early summer](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_plants_spring.pdf) www.wlhf.org/ht_plants_spring.pdf

How to: [Garden organically](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_organic.pdf) for wildlife www.wlhf.org/ht_organic.pdf

How to: Manage [pests and diseases](http://www.wlhf.org/ht_pests.pdf) www.wlhf.org/ht_pests.pdf

Many of the [native species](http://www.wlhf.org/top_wildflowers.html) listed above are on our website www.wlhf.org/top_wildflowers.html

[Plants for wildlife friendly gardens](http://www.wlhf.org/neplants.pdf) booklet www.wlhf.org/neplants.pdf