

## How to: Choose pollinator plants for Winter and early Spring



Photo: Martin Cooper via Wikimedia Commons

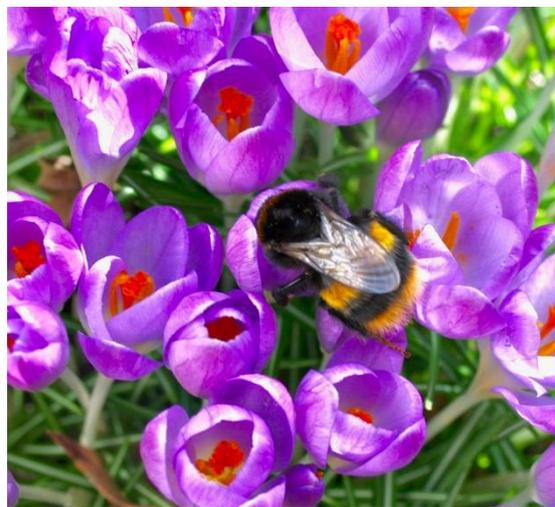


Photo: Janet Quested

*Providing pollinators with nectar and pollen during the winter months is very important. Gardens are a vital source of food for many pollinating insects throughout the coldest months, as fewer wildflowers are in bloom. While nearly all insects are dormant during the winter, they can wake up on unusually warm days in January or February, and this depletes their food reserve unless they can top-up with nectar before going back into hibernation.*

Below is a list of winter and early spring flowering plants which are the best all-rounders for wildlife. Choose a selection of these plants to support a diverse range of pollinators throughout the winter months. Combine this guide with the 'Spring and Summer' and 'Late Summer and Autumn' guides to ensure you are planting an assemblage of species in your garden which flower throughout the year; this can be achieved whatever sized space you have!

**Target species:** Bees, especially bumblebees and flies can be particularly active in winter.

**How easy is it to do?** Easy.

**How much will it cost?** Can be inexpensive; seeds cost little but putting in a lot of garden centre plants can be pricey. Crocus bulbs are cheap bought in bulk. You may be able to swap plants with your friends.

**How effective is it for the target species?** Very effective.

## What species to plant

Winter and early spring flowering species. Not many plants flower at this time, but these are all good for pollinators, 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.

Oregon grape	<i>Mahonia</i> species	Bees
Crocus – spring varieties	<i>Crocus biflorus</i> , <i>x luteus</i> , 'Vanguard'	Bees
<b>Goat/pussy willow</b>	<i>Salix caprea</i>	All groups
<b>Blackthorn</b>	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	All groups
Heathers	<i>Erica carnea</i>	Bees, butterflies
<b>Holly</b>	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	All groups
Wallflower	<i>Erysimum</i> species	Bees, butterflies
Winter aconite	<i>Eranthis hyemalis</i>	Bees, hover
<b>Hellebore</b>	<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	Bees
Laurustinus	<i>Viburnum tinus</i>	Bees, hover

## What to look for?

Bees and flies tend to be the most active pollinators during the winter months and can mostly be seen on sunny mild winter days. Butterflies and moths tend to enter a dormant period over winter, except for a few species such as the winter moth, which is at its most active during this season. Look out for early appearances of the peacock and brimstone butterflies.

## Things to be aware of

Some popular early spring plants such as snowdrops, daffodils and tulips are lovely, but don't have much value for pollinators, although early bumblebees will use snowdrops.

## Further information

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [late summer & autumn](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_summer.pdf) [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_plants\\_summer.pdf](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_summer.pdf)

How to: Choose pollinator plants for [late spring & early summer](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_spring.pdf) [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_plants\\_spring.pdf](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_plants_spring.pdf)

How to: [Garden organically](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_organic.pdf) for wildlife [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_organic.pdf](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_organic.pdf)

How to: Manage [pests and diseases](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_pests.pdf) [www.wlgf.org/ht\\_pests.pdf](http://www.wlgf.org/ht_pests.pdf)

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

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