

Information Note:

Beneficial Insects



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Pollinators - Why we need them and how you can help

Our pollinators, along with many other insects, are in serious decline. They are facing many significant pressures arising from changes in land use, habitat fragmentation, diseases, and pesticides. Through a range of considered practices, farmers, crofters, and land managers can provide a lifeline for pollinators and other insects, providing food and habitat resources to support activities such as nesting, foraging, mating, dispersing, and migrating.

Why support pollinators?

Pollinators are vital for biodiversity and the wider environment. They are important to farmers who grow pollinator-dependent crops and to those of us who want to grow our own fruits and vegetables. Even if we do not currently grow these crops, we should aim to retain the ability to do so for future generations. It is estimated that one third of human food supply relies on bees.

In the past agricultural practices retained more wildflowers and was pollinator friendly. We know that 78% of our wildflowers benefit from being pollinated by insects. Without bees and other pollinators we will not be able to grow the variety of food we currently enjoy, along with losing the natural beauty of our landscape which makes it a pleasant place to work and to live, an attractive destination for tourists, and a selling point for our agricultural produce abroad.

It is estimated that 84% of EU crops (valued at £12.6 billion) and 80% of wildflowers rely on insect pollination (*Buglife*)

What Pollinators Need

Food - Starvation is the main reason for pollinator declines. Pollinators require pollen and nectar from March to October so it's about the continuous supply of pollen throughout this time. Food supply is often short in early spring.

Shelter: Pollinators need somewhere to live. Bumblebees require long grass tussocks often at the base of hedges, solitary bees require bare soil or stone walls to nest in.

Free from chemicals: All insects require space with no insecticides, herbicides, or fungicides.



For more information about Insect Pollinators, pollination and Integrated Pest Management on the FAS website -

www.fas.scot/environment/biodiversity/

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The European Agricultural Fund
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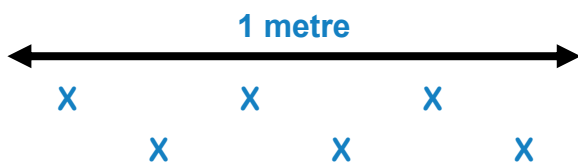
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What can you do?

Maintain native flowering hedgerows, don't cut them too short and only cut every second or third year in rotation and during the winter to allow them to flower. Allow occasional uncut mature species within the hedgerow such as hawthorn and plant flowering native specimen trees elsewhere. Let bramble and Ivy climb through the hedgerows, these are key pollinator species.



Plant 40-60cm whips in double staggered rows about 30cm apart at about 6 plants per metre.



Use a bark/muck or plastic mulch to control weeds initially and prevent losses.



Flowering hedgerows with a variety of native plants are often best for wildlife, particularly insects.

Don't be tidy, allow verges and field edges

to grow and provide wildflowers plus grass tussocks. Cut verges only once a year in the autumn to allow the flowers to provide pollinator food and set seed. Allow hedgerows to be wider at the base, 1.5 to 2m and incorporate an ungrazed ground layer of grassland and flowers to provide shelter

A 2 - 3m strip creates good biosecurity for your farm by avoiding nose-to-nose contact between your animals and those of your neighbours. It also provides space for pollinators, protection of watercourses and bufferstrips.

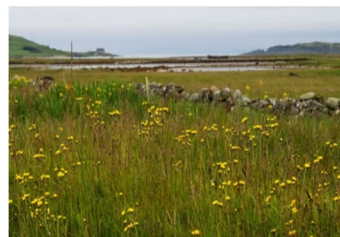


Reduce the use of pesticides herbicides and artificial fertilisers where possible. Be aware of no spray zones and avoid spraying on a windy day to avoid chemical drift. Always use low drift nozzles,

reducing use can save time and money as well as increasing your biodiversity credentials. Only use fertilisers when they are required and avoid corners and field edges. Never apply fertilisers to wildflower areas. Many seeds come pre-treated with systemic insecticides and fungicides. Research is being carried out but studies show that seed treatments can persist in the soil, leach into waterways and harm pollinators and other wildlife. Ask your supplier about this.



For bumblebees, allow tussocky grassland to develop under hedgerows, against walls, in field margins and corners between March and October. These areas can be cut out-with that time as bumblebee colonies go into hibernation. Mining solitary bees require bare soil in well drained areas and banks particularly South and East facing banks, do not remove this type of habitat and be aware that it is valuable.

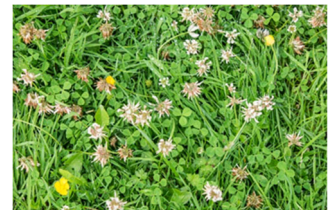


Cavity nesting solitary bees require south facing stone walls. Never remove old stone walls as they are very valuable habitats.

Shady mossy banks, earth dykes and bare ground particularly north west facing provide nesting sites for bees, bumblebees and wasps. Dead wood and holes in wood are used by solitary bees and wasps.



Include clover in your reseed mixes. Clovers naturally fix nitrogen but also provide excellent food for pollinators; think about using a pollinator friendly annual cover crop. Don't cut clover leys too early for bees.



Phacelia sown along field margins is one of the best spring forage sources.

