Planting for insects

There are many small acts we can all undertake to enhance the biodiversity of our gardens[1] – but perhaps the best way of helping invertebrate populations is choosing to grow insect friendly plants.[2]

"An abundance of invertebrates of all types equate to a healthy garden ecology."[3]

Even small gardens can contain many hundreds of species of plants, animals, and insects.[4] All are members of the garden community and play a vital role in maintaining a healthy and balanced ecosystem. Every garden contains many types of insects including: herbivores that feed on living plants, detritivores, that feed on decomposing animal or plant matter, omnivores, that eat both plants and insects and predators that eat other invertebrates.[3]

"Flowers…provide food resources, nectar and pollen for invertebrates."[5]

Many flying insects such as butterflies, bees and hoverflies visit flowers for their nectar and pollen and perform an essential role in pollination. The problem is that the populations of some 1500 species of pollinators in the UK are in decline. These losses are mainly due to factors such as habitat loss and reduced food sources.[6]

"The best advice is to plant a variety of flowering plants in gardens, biased towards native and near native species with a careful selection of exotics to extend the flowering season."[5]

Studies show that native plant species support the maximum number of different types of insects.[3] Native plants are species that arrived in the British Isles without human intervention.[5] Typically, however most domestic gardens consist of a mixture of native and near-native plants. The latter are species that occur naturally only in the Northern- Hemisphere but are not native to the British Isles.[5] All can play an essential role in supporting biodiversity.[5]

It is also suggested that you add in a few exotics to your garden to extend the flowering season. Exotic plants are species occurring naturally only in the Southern Hemisphere.[5]

But whatever you choose, try to avoid highly bred cultivars with big double flowers – they may look pretty, but most contain little or no pollen or nectar and contribute nothing to the community of the garden.[7]

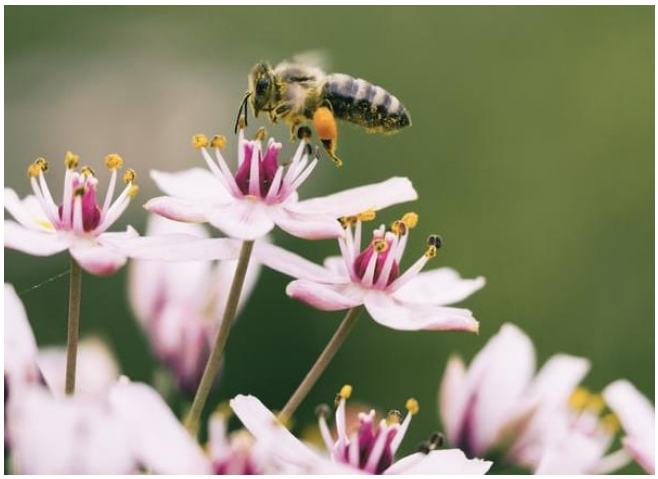
"The greater the variety of plants in a garden, the higher the diversity of invertebrates it will support."[8]

Research has shown that diversity is an excellent "strategy for supporting pollinating insects"[6] and is important in promoting insect abundance and species richness.[5] So don't limit your planting to a small range of species - try to plant a wide range of different plants.[6] Also consider the seasons – and select a range of plants that flower throughout the year.[6] Also try to include some evergreens in your garden, whatever their origin, as these provide essential winter shelter to insects.[8]

"The more densely you plant the more invertebrates your garden will support."[3]

A high abundance and volume of vegetation in your garden also plays a key role - so plant generously and allow plants to fill all the spaces to maximise foliage density and cover.[3] The plants you select will have a large impact on the insects which decide to come and live in your garden.[4] There are many lists of recommended species on the internet that could be used to help you choose which to plant. Perhaps, the best know are those published by the Royal Horticultural Society under the general title of "Plants for Pollinators" These lists cover "Garden Plants", "Wildflowers" and "Plants of the World" and can be found on the following link:

https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators



Together we could make a substantial difference and assist in reversing the dramatic decline of Nature in Britain – hope lies[9] in the millions of gardens in our towns and cities.[10] Our individual gardens may be small, but every one of them has the potential to provide food, shelter, and breeding sites for a wide range of animals.[1] The actions we take – especially by growing insect friendly plants - can play an important role in retaining and enhancing insect populations and in rebuilding biodiversity in your garden.[5]

"Garden plants…support a wide range…of invertebrates."[3]

So why not transform your garden? Take the time to select and plant seeds and grow a wide variety of suitable flowers that will bloom throughout spring, summer and autumn and provide insects with vital habitat and food.[9] With this simple act you could transform your garden into a vibrant ecosystem and support hundreds of different insect species.[4]

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