

Bees

Did you know there are around **270** different species of bee living in the UK?

Bees are hugely important in our ecosystem as they pollinate many of the plants that produce the food we eat as well as most flowering plants. Without bees, we could quickly go hungry.

Bumblebees are the big fluffy ones that we see zooming around from flower to flower on a sunny day and there are 24 different types of them in the UK! Here are three you might see when you are in your garden or on a walk.

Tree Bumblebee

Easily identified by their ginger thorax, black abdomen and white tail. You will find them in habitats ranging from woodland to gardens.



White-tailed Bumblebee

White-tailed bumblebees have a bright yellow collar, a yellow abdomen band and a bright white tail. They can be found almost anywhere, feeding on flowers ranging from thistles and buddleia to brambles and scabious.



Common Carder Bee

These beautiful little bees are the only UK species with all dark colouring and no white tail. They range from ginger to a pale, sandy brown, depending on how sun-bleached they are. They are found everywhere from farmland to gardens. Gorse is one of their favourite foods, as well as Dandelions (**don't dig them all up!**), bluebells, and foxgloves.



When you are next outside, see how many of each type you can spot.

Other types of bees include **Mason Bees** (who nest by themselves in holes in the wall or bee hotels etc.), **Mining Bees** (who nest by themselves in holes in the ground) and **Honey Bees** (who live in large groups in hives or somewhere hidden like holes in trees). These are all much smaller than Bumblebees, and sometimes people mistake them for wasps.

Red Mason Bee



Tawny Mining Bee



Honey Bee



Honey Bees are the bees who make all the honey that many people eat. But **did you know** that they don't make it for us but actually make it as a way of storing food for themselves so they have something to eat over the winter, when there are fewer flowers from which to gather food.

Bees in trouble!

Sadly, bees are under threat now because of habitat loss, use of pesticides and climate change. It's important that we don't lose bees not only for the bees themselves but for all other plant and animal life (including humans) as we all depend on their hard work so much. (They are the essential workers of the animal world!)

Can we help?

Fortunately, there are lots of things you can do to help protect these important creatures.

Fill your garden with bee-friendly flowers

One of the easiest ways to help out bees is by planting lots of bee-friendly flowers in your garden. Bees like lots of different flowering plants and you can order seeds online or collect them from plants when they have finished flowering.

Provide shelter for bees

Bees need shelter to nest and hibernate in. You can easily create your own shelter or buy a ready-made bee and insect house – just hang it up in a sunny sheltered spot in your garden and watch bees filling the tubes during the spring and summer months. Here is a link to show you how you can make a bee hotel out of a plastic bottle for Mason Bees (which don't sting) to live in. <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/make-a-bee-house>

Stop using pesticides

Pesticides are one of the key threats to bees, and so one way to help bees is to stop using them in your own garden. Some 'pests' provide food for crucial pollinators, so leaving them to be controlled naturally is the best choice if you want to help save bees.

Help a bee in need

During the summer months, you may spot a bee sitting unmoving on the ground. Whilst it is easy to presume it might be dead or dying, chances are it is actually exhausted and in need of a quick pick-me-up. You can help out a tired bee by mixing two tablespoons of white, granulated sugar with one tablespoon of water, placing it near the bee so it can help itself to this homemade energy drink. Then, once it is feeling better, you can watch it fly away happily ready to pollinate more plants.

Dandelions.

You will see lots of these happy-looking plants around in your garden and on your walks. Many people think of them as weeds and remove them but, in fact, they are very important food for bees and other pollinators.



Did you know that we can also eat Dandelions? From root to flower, dandelions are highly nutritious plants, loaded with vitamins, minerals and fibre. Dandelion leaves can be eaten cooked or raw and are an excellent source of vitamins A, C and K as well as vitamin E, folate and small amounts of other B vitamins.

They are also lots of fun to blow as a dandelion clock!

