Buying pollinator-friendly flowers and bulbs for your garden

There are lots of ways that you can make your garden friendly for wildlife. Roselle Chapman from Wild Oxfordshire shares some of her top tips here listen from 5 minutes 30 seconds) or read on.

https://pennypost.org.uk/2020/12/wildlife-friendly-gardening-tips/?fbclid=IwAR2Mr_n35twGCux42gX9A7TQ7DY5X2Os9ibaRbJqaOgaZ1IhguwURmp1TM0

Winter Wildlife Tips

Winter flowering shrubs such as viburnums, lonicera and mahonia provide vital nourishment for bumble bees and other pollinators. Hollow stalks like sage, dead nettle, allium, fennel (above), golden rod will be home to insect eggs and larvae during the winter so don't tidy them out of your garden. Wood piles are important habitats for beetles and other insects that are the bottom of the food chain and scrubby areas of the garden provide refuge for small mammals and amphibians who need shelter from predators (especially cats). When buying bulbs for the spring see below for the importance of using suppliers who don't treat their bulbs with pesticides which will harm pollinators along with the other insects they are designed to kill.

In general, if you maximise the biodiversity of your garden, you will have a healthy predator/prey web which means that the critters you don't want around (eg aphids) will be taken care of by their natural predators (eg parasitic wasps). If you use chemicals to kill aphids, the wasps will be killed too.

Looking ahead to the spring, your lawn doesn't need to be carpet-perfect (unless you are a bowling or golf club!).

If you leave the moss it will keep the moisture in your lawn so you don't have to water it so often and if you don't cut it so short and allow clover, daisies and dandelions to flourish you will be providing welcome food for pollinators.

This is a tricky topic as everyone who buys flowers to feed bees and other pollinators that visit their garden will be gutted to realise that those flowers (often marketed as 'bee-friendly') will be a poisoned chalice if they contain pesticides. Designed to kill aphids and sap-sucking insects, pesticides are also very harmful to our precious pollinators. Recent research suggests that the distribution of bee and hoverfly species has declined by an average of 25% across Britain since 1980, particularly among specialist species (Powney et al., 2019).

Farmers do need to protect their crops from insects. But researchers like Professor David Goulson from the University of Sussex believe that less harmful chemicals will not be developed as long as growers are allowed to use pesticides like neonicotinoids in an emergency and the big pharma companies that make them, like Bayer and Syngenta, continue to take powerful legal action against the bans on neonicotinoids.

In 2018 Goulson and Friends of the Earth launched the Great British Bee Count and there was much media coverage of the issue of neonicotinoids. David also analysed the pesticide levels in plants on sale in garden centres and shops that revealed many plants being marketed as 'bee-friendly' were infact laced with pesticides harmful to bees.

In response to media coverage, B&Q and other retailers announced that they were prohibiting their suppliers from using neonicotinoids. But other pesticides that are very harmful to pollinators are still legal. So the problem still exists.

How to avoid bringing pesticides into your garden

Be careful who you buy from. There are plenty of organic bulb and plant suppliers to choose from. The initial investment might be a little bit more expensive, but you could save money by swapping plants with friends, propagating cuttings from plants like cranesbill geraniums and lungwort, lavender and rosemary or growing from seed. In 2018, UK bulb retailer Peter Nyssen decided to source all their spring-flowering bulbs from growers who don't use from neonics so that their customer's spring flowers will be genuinely bee friendly.

Also make sure that everything has been grown in peat-free compost because peat acts as a carbon store, it's a great habitat for wildlife, it has a role in water management, and preserves things well for archaeology.

Pet flea treatment endangers water insects

It is also now being recognised that the nerve agent in pet flea treatment called fiprinol exists at very harmful levels in our rivers, threatening water insects and the birds and fish higher up the food chain that depend on them.

The washing of pets was already known to flush fipronil into sewers and then rivers, while dogs swimming in rivers causes direct contamination. “It has to be the flea treatments causing the pollution,” Goulson said. “Really, there’s no other conceivable source.”

There are many veterinary products containing fipronil and imidacloprid in the UK, many of which are sold without prescriptions. Many pets are treated monthly, whether they have fleas or not.

One of the worst cases is from Dec 2018 – Jan 2019 when half a million bees in Brazil were killed by fipronil that was used to control ants and termites on soy crops.

So please talk to your vet about limiting flea treatment of your pets.

More Information on Wildlife Gardening

Lots of links here for more information from Wild Oxfordshire’s
https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/communities/resources/