



How to Manage Community Gardens for Pollinators

Helping pollinators in community gardens

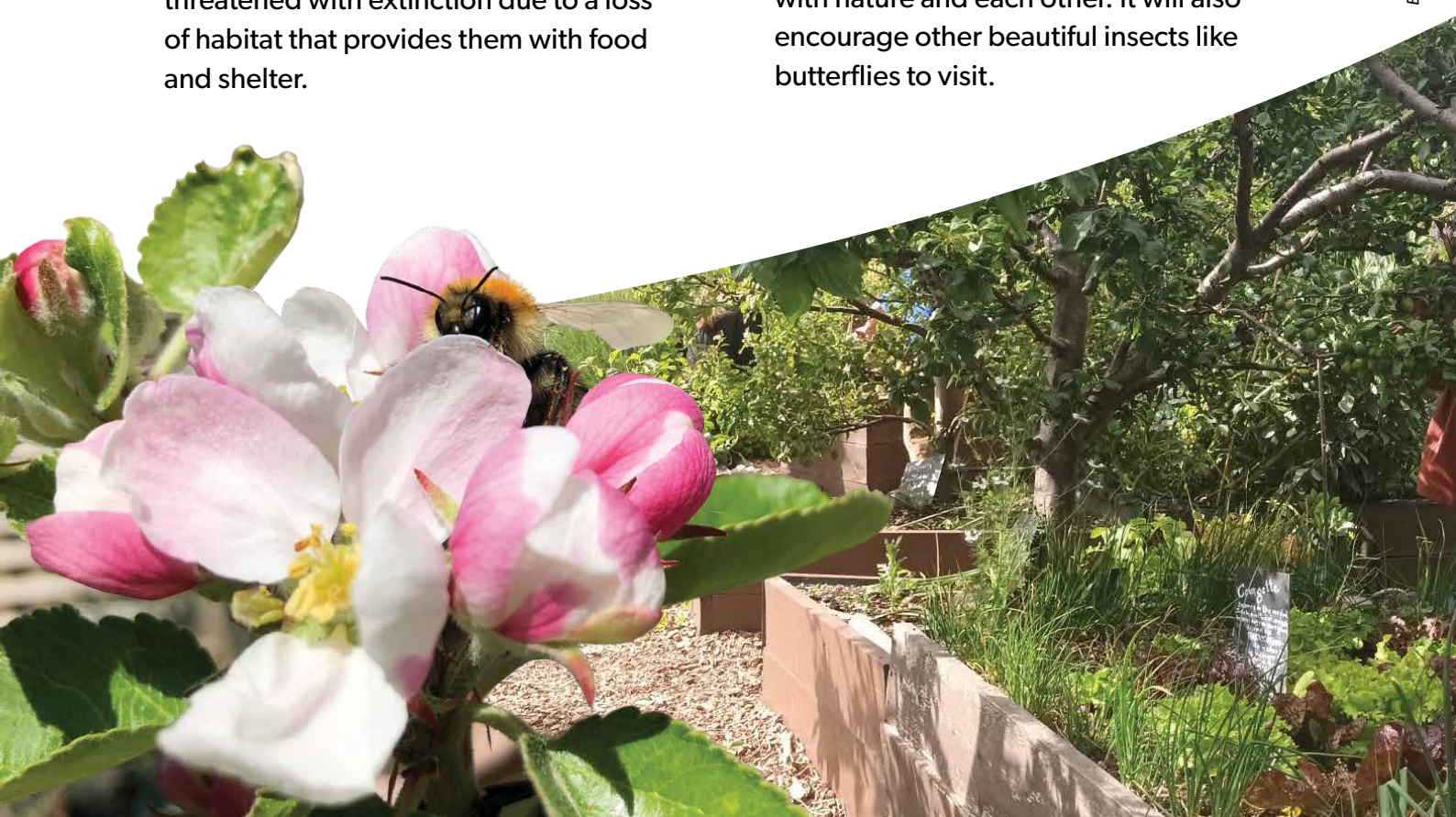
Pollinators play an essential role in the life of community gardens. These important insects ensure many food plants produce a healthy harvest by transferring pollen between flowers. Apples, strawberries, tomatoes and pumpkins are just some of the foods we enjoy thanks to pollinators.

On the island of Ireland, most pollination is carried out by wild bees (bumblebees and solitary bees) as well as other insects like hoverflies and moths. One third are threatened with extinction due to a loss of habitat that provides them with food and shelter.

A sustainable future for food

To give ourselves and future generations access to a sustainable food supply, we need to create a network of habitats to support pollinators. By making sure they can find food, shelter, and safety, community gardens can help create a landscape where pollinators can survive and thrive.

Managing your community garden for pollinators will ensure a bountiful harvest, thriving local biodiversity, and help create flourishing spaces where we can connect with nature and each other. It will also encourage other beautiful insects like butterflies to visit.



A pollinator-friendly community garden provides FOOD in the form of pollen-rich flowers, SHELTER for nesting, and SAFETY by eliminating pesticides.

Be wild – allow nature to reclaim some areas. If possible, let plants like thistles, nettles and bramble grow.

To prevent high mortality of larvae from fungus moulds, bug houses need protection from wet weather.

Earth banks, bare soil, gaps in walls, piles of stones and logs can provide homes for bees.



Sheds, buildings, walls and fences offer additional growing spaces.



BLACKTHORN HAWTHORN

Native hedgerow plants like Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Willow provide food and shelter for pollinators.

A glasshouse or poly-tunnel helps you grow plants from seeds and protects less hardy plants in winter.

Leave some vegetables and green manures to flower.

Avoid using harmful chemicals.

Herbs are a good communal crop for picking throughout the season.



CHIVES THYME SAGE ROSEMARY

These food plants are particularly good for pollinators:



BEANS COURGETTES TOMATOES STRAWBERRIES

Pollinator-friendly flowerbeds and borders in sunny spots provide food throughout the year.

Fruit trees can be grown as a standard tree, in pots, trained against walls or along wires. Apple trees may be grown in an arch or as a low step-over border to separate areas.



APPLE



CLOVER DANDELION SELFHEAL

Planting blocks of the same type of flower saves time for pollinators as they can move from flower to flower more quickly.

Cut your grass less often to help native wildflowers grow. Make sure you remove cuttings to reduce soil fertility. Harvest your wildflower seed to help create and enhance other local meadows.



IVY

Mature ivy along a fence can provide food and shelter for a variety of pollinators.

Twelve ways your community garden can help pollinators



1. Don't mow, let it grow

Pick some areas to cut and lift every six weeks, or once a year. Even verges or small strips will give native wildflowers a chance to grow.



2. Manage native hedgerows

Flowers grow on older wood, so cut every three years instead of annually.



3. Plant pollinator-friendly trees

Plant a young native tree such as Willow, Rowan or Holly, or grow them from seed. Add fruit trees or a small orchard.



4. Eliminate pesticides

Try manual weeding or companion-planting instead or let Dandelions bloom—they are one of the best food sources for bees. Also consider good soil practices like a compost pile and no-dig gardening.



5. Create nesting habitats

Scrape back some bare earth, or drill holes 10cm deep in unvarnished wood for solitary bees. Consider other wildlife-friendly initiatives such as adding a pond, bird or bat boxes, and leaving some seed heads in place for hungry birds.



6. Choose nectar and pollen-rich plants

Many fruit and vegetables are great sources of pollen and nectar, relying on pollinators to produce fruit. You can also add ornamental pollinator-friendly plants to pots and hanging baskets.



7. Don't get honey bees to help biodiversity

They can compete for food with the wild pollinators who are already struggling.



8. Avoid wildflower seed mixes

They can contain non-native species like Cornflowers. Reduce mowing instead to encourage native wildflowers.



9. Keep insect hotels small

No bigger than bird box. This prevents predators and disease. If buying or building your own, make sure to only use natural materials with no paint or varnish.



10. Record biodiversity

Get the whole community involved in citizen science by carrying out Flower-Insect-Timed (FIT) Counts and submit records of the pollinators you find.



11. Include biodiversity in your garden management

Create a Biodiversity Officer role on your committee. Add your commitment to biodiversity into your garden values and rules.



12. Spread the word

Tell your garden community about the good work you are doing by putting up signage and running biodiversity workshops and events. Connect with your local authority Biodiversity Officer and link in with local schools and other community groups.