

Api:Cultural Guide to the best plants for Bumble Bees

Bumble Bees

There are 24 species of Bumble bee in the UK some of which have short tongues and some which have long tongues. Only 8 species are commonly found throughout the UK, the rest are becoming increasingly scarce. Their tongue length determines which sort of flowers they prefer to forage on. When planting for Bumble bees it its important to plant a range of plants that will accommodate species with varying tongue lengths.

Among the plants most important for Bumble Bees are the legumes which include Birds Foot Trefoil, Clover's and Vetches. Dead Nettle and other members of the Laminacea are also important particularly early in the season when Queens need to gain weight to reach breeding condition. Echium, Scabious and Knapweeds are important in late summer followed by Thistles which are also used as mating platforms as well as a food source.

In Gardens Bumble bees will be attracted to Echinacea, Globe Thistle, Salvia's, Dahlia's, Cosmos and Sunflowers in Late Summer.

Species	Flight period	popular food plants
Buff Tailed Bumble Bee (ST)	January to December	Generalist feeds on a wide variety of flowers. Phacelia, Lavenders, Caryopteris, Lime trees, Dahlia, White Deadnettle, Echinops, Echinacea, Dandelion, Mahonia, Crocus, Hellebore, Salvia, Echium, Cardoon, Thistles, Ivy, Purple Loosestrife, Hebe, Choyisia
White Tailed Bumble Bee (ST)	March to September	Generalist feeds on similar plants to the closely related Buff Tailed Bumble Bee.
Early Bumble Bee (ST)	February to November	Fond of early flowering shrubs. Flowering Currant, Sarcococca, Viburnums, Pulmonaria, Hebe, Aquilegia, Nasturtium, Fruiting Currant, Gooseberry
Red Tailed Bumble Bee (ST)	March to October	Birds Foot Trefoil, Dandelion, Chicory, Scabious, Knapweeds, Corn Flower, Phacelia, White Clover
Tree Bumble Bee (ST)	February to September	Prefers taller plants, avoids feeding close to the ground. Bramble, fruit trees, Lavender, Phacelia, Ivy , teasel, Escalonia, Thistles
Garden Bumble Bee (LT)	March to September	Fox Glove, Aquilegia, Red Clover, Vetches, White Dead Nettle, Abelia, Escalonia
Common Carder Bee (LT)	March to November	Wall flower Bowles Mauve, Beans, Vetches, Dead Nettle, Catmint, Salvia, Pea, Bramble* Knapweed, Thistle, Agapanthus, Flag Iris
Southern Cuckoo Bee	March to September	Chives, Alliums, Phacelia

Below: a Buff Tailed Bumble Bee on
Wall Flower Bowles Mauve



Below: the yellow flower of Birds Foot
Trefoil



Below: a Buff Tailed Bumble Bee on
Phacelia tanacetum



Below: a Southern Cuckoo Bee Knapweed



Left: Buff Tailed Bumble Bee on Field Scabious

Below: Tree Bumble Bee on Teasel



Left:
Red Tailed
Bumble Bee
on Chicory