

## **Who's welcome in your garden?**

***Diana Muir of the Plant Plot in Lichfield talks to Staffordshire Life about the huge array of flying wildlife we can expect to see in our gardens this summer and how we encourage the best and deter the pests!***

As August approaches, our regular garden visitors - the birds - move on in search of fresh berries and grain and a chance for their feathers to moult. Our familiar winged friends are temporarily replaced with winged creatures of a different sort - dragonflies, butterflies, bees and other bugs. Some are most welcome whilst others are deemed a pest.

How do we create a garden that is welcoming to some and deters other aphids and beasties that have the potential to undo all our good gardening work? Clever planting can help you no end as you can plant to attract your 'most wanted' creatures and you can also try companion planting. Companion planting is a natural way of maintaining balance and reducing unwanted pests. By planting marigolds next to tomatoes, for example, a scent is produced that deters pests such as greenfly and blackfly. There are several examples of successful companion planting - the staff at The Plant Plot will be able to advise if you have a particular pest problem.

By encouraging your welcome guests, you can also work on keeping the others at bay. For example, adult dragonflies will eat many of the most annoying garden pests and are, aesthetically, a very welcome addition to the garden. Some of the delicacies they enjoy include flies, midges and aphids. As dragonflies need water to raise their young, a pond is a great enticer to get them into your garden.

"It's important to be practical when working on improving your insect population" explains Diana Muir of the Plant Plot. "For example, the spiteful stinging nettle provides essential food for caterpillars but it is unlikely you'll want them in your garden just to get a good supply of butterflies. Equally an unmown lawn offers a rich source of pollen and seeds but you don't necessarily want to leave your lawn to grow in an unwieldy, unattractive way" she finished.

When planting a nectar border for the hard-working bumble bee, consider buying a selection of flowers that will provide a great viewpoint and array of colour as well as selecting ones most likely to attract insects. Single flowered plants are a great choice for the easy access to insects enabling the nectar and pollen to be at easy reach. Feathery plants such as chervil and dill are particularly rich in nectar and, as they are a perfect treat for hoverflies and lacewings, they will reward you as their larvae eat aphids. Being easy to grow, herbs such as thyme, valerian, sage, borage, caraway and angelica provide insects like bees and butterflies with the essential nectar and pollen they are in search of.

Seeking warmth and shelter, butterflies are attracted to welcoming gardens. A suitable garden for butterflies will provide a range of plants flowering and providing nectar from spring right through until autumn. The well-known *Buddleja davidii* also known as the 'butterfly bush' creates cone shaped clusters in a variety of vibrant colours, strong in scent rich in nectar, perfect for butterflies. By positioning it in a sunny spot with well drained soil, the long flowering *Buddleja* heads will develop and transform the bush, creating a stunning display for four to six weeks, attracting clouds of butterflies.

A final word in defence of garden pests – it's important to recognise that some insects are beneficial at one stage of life and a pest at another. Usually, the beneficial creatures need a supply of what we consider pests, such as larvae, to survive. From these brief garden notes, you can begin to see how the processes work. Creating the right zones and spaces in your garden may take some time to perfect but it's worth persevering to get the right balance for a wonderful display of flying beauty throughout the summer months.

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