



Practical advice

- Biodiversity means the variety of life which is usually greater in natural habitats than man made ones. There is no one way to encourage biodiversity – it all depends on what plants or animals you want to encourage.
- Scotland, like the rest of the British Isles, would naturally be covered in trees and bushes. Many habitats we now value, such as wildflower meadows, are the result of human activities such as farming and need active management to continue.
- Think habitats rather than individual species - if you get the habitat right many forms of wildlife will colonise without human help. Structures such as log piles, bug hotels and nest boxes can enhance an area but are no substitute for quality habitat. They can be very valuable educationally so think about where they are sited – do you want children to see into them or is there a problem with vandalism?
- Wildflower meadows are areas with native species growing among permanent grass. The range of species you get depends on the soil and local growing conditions. Do not rush to plant wildflowers; there is no point in putting sun lovers like thyme on heavy soil in the shade of trees where wild hyacinths would flourish. Just reduce mowing to one or two cuts a year, remove the clippings and see what appears.
- Cornfield annuals like poppies and marigolds naturally grow in disturbed ground such as arable fields. To grow these successfully year after year you need to cultivate and probably re-sow.
- Visually untidy areas can also be a valuable habitat e.g. thickets with brambles, nettles and thorn bushes are excellent for songbirds. If creating a wetland, remember most plants do not grow in deep water but along the margins.
- Most of our garden plants are not native but many can be useful e.g. to bees; a few are dangerously invasive so be aware of them. Those subject to special regulations include Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and several water plants. Some plants of value to wildlife are now causing concern as they spread so rapidly, such as some cotoneasters and the butterfly bush, Buddleja. Many seeds are now advertised as good for wildlife. These seeds may not be of British origin and should not be sown on nature reserves or other areas of high conservation status.

- When planning, think over time periods e.g. with bees and butterflies how many months will there be nectar sources? Also, be aware of life histories. Butterfly bushes attract adult insects in late summer – the caterpillars have to feed on other plants, several on nettles.
- Often there is a need to make sure wildlife habitat is also attractive to people. You may need to compromise. Berries are attractive to us and the birds; white and yellow often last longer than red ones. Cut or mow paths through wildflower areas to allow people to walk without getting their feet soaked in long grass. Ragwort is an example of a plant of wildlife value that is very poisonous to livestock.
- No need to re-invent the wheel – there are many sources of advice and help at local and national levels. Try to show evidence of how you monitor your projects e.g. how many nest boxes birds use and what species, how many young do they rear? This is where you may find it worth contacting local naturalists e.g. qualified ringers could ring chicks in your nest boxes. Use photos to provide evidence of activities not easy to show on judging day.

Useful links & further information:

[Garden for Life Forum – downloadable guides](#)

www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/community-gardening/resources/wildlife

<http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/>

<https://thecaley.org.uk/>

www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland

www.buglife.org.uk/local/buglife-scotland

And for all of your supplier needs:

www.scotiaseeds.co.uk