

Press release: Bees' Needs Champions awards celebrate pollinator heroes

A 'Bee City' and a successful reintroduction scheme for the short-haired bumblebee are among the innovative projects highlighted today by Defra Minister Lord Gardiner as inspirational examples of action to protect our pollinators.

The annual [Bees' Needs](#) Champions awards, hosted at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, celebrated 17 bee boosting projects from volunteers, schools, charities and councils across the country which are helping pollinators thrive both in the countryside and in our towns and cities.

From buzzing bumble bees to beautiful butterflies, the UK's 1,500 species of pollinators play a crucial role, helping our flowers, fruit trees and crops to grow and contributing £400-680million per year due to improved productivity.

Speaking at the Bees' Needs Champions Awards, Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity Lord Gardiner said:

We must all be thankful for our essential pollinators who do such vital work on our behalf, flying from crop to crop, tree to tree, helping us to grow our food. The champions I had the pleasure to meet today are doing exceptional things to return the favour and look after our pollinators. We must not leave them to it. We can all play a part.

Whether it is leaving grass uncut to give bees a home over winter, or inspiring young people to be the pollinator protectors of the future, our combined efforts make a real difference.

Among the champion projects creating a buzz were the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's short-haired bumblebee re-introduction scheme and the Secret Garden project in Salisbury with their 'Bee City' and 'Bee Trail'.

Goldthorpe Primary School in Barnsley and St Albans Primary School in Havant also featured for their pollinator-encouraging enterprises, including building bee hotels, creating wildlife meadows and campaigning in the local community. St Albans school has set up a 'pollinator promise' to get the local community involved, too.

Outdoor education teacher at St Albans Primary School, Julie Newman, said:

By working together as a community, Pollinator Promise is about inspiring others to give hungry and homeless bees food and shelter. Each small individual change adds up to make a big difference to

pollinators and people.

Friends of the Earth Bee Cause campaigner, Paul de Zylva, said:

This year's Bees' Needs Champions show how anyone anywhere can help our bees and other vital pollinators not just to survive but to thrive.

The ten year [National Pollinator Strategy](#) is now in its fourth year and relies on action by businesses, community groups, farmers, land owners and local councils to improve conditions for pollinators. Doing so is essential to restore nature across the nation.

With winter fast approaching, bees need our help more than ever to provide them with the food and shelter they need to survive the cold.

Everyone can follow our three top tips on how we can all help pollinators this winter. You do not have to be an expert gardener to make a difference: from installing urban window boxes to planting the right bulbs, everyone can play their part to ensure bees have food and a home.

- Plant flowers, shrubs and trees that thrive in winter. The evergreen mahonia is excellent winter food for bees, while the pendant bells of winter flowering clematis can give pollinators a sugary energy boost. Ivy plants are also an ideal source of food for bees in late autumn – avoid cutting them down.
- Leave suitable places for hibernation undisturbed. Letting areas of a lawn grow long until the spring can provide a hibernation home while cool, north-facing banks are ideal places for bees to burrow. The hollow tubes of dead stems of plants in borders can also serve as a great nesting spot.
- Planting early flowering bulbs like crocus, primrose, snowdrop or coltsfoot that flower in February and March to help support bees and pollinators looking for an early feed. Winter is also the perfect time to plant bee-friendly trees, such as acacia, blackthorn and hazel.