



Our suggested herbs and bulbs for your Pollination Education Station (PES)

What do pollinators like to eat?

These 9 common herbs are among some of the best plants in providing bees with valuable nectar and pollen throughout the year. They also happen to be some of the best herbs for cooking with. These popular herbs are easy to grow, saving you money on your shopping bill, reduce packaging, food miles and CO2.

Rather than buying the herbs in plastic pots from the garden centre we suggest you divide sprawling herbs from your garden or a friend or neighbour's garden. Herbs like mint, thyme or oregano are easy to split, just carefully dig up the plant and split in two, salvaging chunks of the roots. Then, replant it and water it regularly until the roots are reestablished.

Perhaps on the day of your PES installation you organise a herb swap after you have selected the best herbs for your PES!

Here are some suggestions for easy herbs to grow for your pollinators and a few cooking ideas which are great with fresh garden herbs. Please try and select herbs which provide the widest coverage across the year.

With this in mind you might like to supplement your herbs with early flowering bulbs and plants to provide nectar and pollen when there is little around. These spring flowers would be good: snowdrops, primroses and crocus, using organic bulbs and seeds of course. The nectar season can be extended into late autumn by planting ivy (*Hedera helix*) to grow up the side of the PES.

Best herbs to grow in the PES herb containers:

1. Wild marjoram plant and oregano

This aromatic herb produces pinkish-white drifts of nectar-rich flowers. Growing wild marjoram attracts bumblebees, honeybees, leafcutter and furrow bees. Bees also love oregano – it is from the same group of plants as marjoram (Oreganums).

Flowering season: Summer and early autumn.

Cooking with marjoram: Sprinkle on a home-made pizza. Add to tomato sauces for pasta. Combine with other herbs in a stuffing. Use to add flavour to beans, chickpeas and lentils in stews and salads.

Types of herbs: Look for *Origanum vulgare*, the marjoram that grows wild in the UK. Pot marjoram and sweet marjoram (*Origanum majorana*) are also available.

2. Rosemary

Pluck fresh needles from this drought-tolerant herb all year round. Its flared blue-purple flowers attract mason bees, flower bees, bumblebees and honeybees. Short of space? Pot creeping rosemary in a sunny spot.

Flowering season: Starts in spring. Can continue throughout the year – even in winter.

Cooking with rosemary: Rosemary keeps its flavour well when cooked so it's a perfect companion to slow-roasted dishes. It will easily liven up a tomato sauce for pasta too, along with anchovies.

Types of herbs: Look for *Rosmarinus officinalis* or, if you have more space, creeping rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis prostratus*).

3. Mint

Does mint attract bees? You bet. And it's easy to grow. **Pop in a pot** to prevent it invading other plants. Got a pond? Try growing water mint (*Mentha aquatica*) – bees and hoverflies love it.

Flowering season: Summer and early autumn.

Cooking with mint: Freshen up any dessert using a variety of mint flavours including strawberry, chocolate and ginger. Mint water ice is very easy to make and delicious on hot summer days. Mint tea is refreshing and a great digestive.

Types of herbs: Try spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) for a traditional taste, peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*), for a slightly stronger flavour, and apple mint (*Mentha suaveolens*) for something different.

4. Chives

Chives are easy to grow in pots or a window box. Snip with scissors at the base of the plants to encourage more leaves to grow. The edible purple flowers feed bumblebees, honeybees, mason bees and leafcutter bees. Share with the bees and add colour to your salads.

Flowering season: Spring and summer.

Cooking with chives: Great with soft white cheeses. Try with goat's cheese, tomatoes, salad leaves and a drizzle of olive oil. Sprinkle freshly snipped chives on an omelette. Or add to a potato salad for a delicious, mild oniony flavour.

Types of herbs: *Allium schoenoprasum* – and *Allium tuberosum*, which has a delicate garlic flavour.

5. Sage

Leafcutter bees and long-tongued garden bumblebees love its purple spiky flowers. Edible sage plants are a world apart from the dried herb. Keep in a sheltered spot and you'll have fresh sage pretty much all year round.

Flowering season: Late spring, summer.

Cooking with sage: Sage is delicious in butternut squash risotto and makes a lovely garnish for this dish.

Quickly fry whole sage leaves for a few seconds in a little olive oil until they turn crisp, and add as a finishing touch.

Types of herbs: Try common sage (*Salvia officinalis*) for cooking. There are ornamental (non-edible) varieties too.

6. Thyme

Grow a herb 'carpet' – plant thyme in paving cracks and enjoy the aroma when you walk on it. It works just as well in a pot. Fantastic for honeybees, bumblebees, mason bees and leafcutter bees.

Flowering season: Summer.

Cooking with thyme: Delicious in a risotto with courgettes, lemon, garlic and parmesan. Or try something a little different – add fresh thyme leaves to Bramley apples, stew with a little sugar and use in a crumble.

Types of herbs: *Thymus vulgaris* (common thyme). "*Thymus polytrichus* subsp. *britannicus*" attracts lots of bumblebees. There are many varieties of thyme – some taste better than others.

If you have space near the Pollination Education Station these are good herbs

Best plants for pollinators but not in the PES herb container

Why not make a beautiful pollinator bed beside the PES or set within a wildflower bank!

7. Borage

Bees love borage, aka 'starflower'. Its shallow, bright blue blooms attract bees with short tongues, like the buff-tailed bumblebee. You can eat the flowers as well as the leaves – but leave some for the bees!

Flowering season: Spring, summer and early autumn

Cooking with borage: The beautiful blue flowers add 'wow' to summer dishes and cocktails. They have a sweet, honey-like taste. Borage leaves taste a bit like cucumber. Try them in salads or use as a garnish.

Types of herbs: Look for the annual *Borago officinalis*. It self-seeds, so you shouldn't need to buy plants every year.

8. Hyssop

Hyssop thrives in sunshine and tolerates drought. Its strong-flavoured leaves taste like a cross between mint and sage. The deep flowers suit longer-tongued bees, including garden bumblebees and wool carder bees.

Flowering season: Summer and early autumn.

Cooking with hyssop: Hyssop is strong, so use sparingly. Young leaves go well with oily fish such as mackerel or sardines, with new potatoes and a salad of watercress and rocket.

Types of herbs: Hyssopus officinalis.

9. Lemon balm

The smell of the leaves crushed between your fingers is delicious. Easy to grow, and like mint, benefits from being in its own pot because it will spring up everywhere. Honeybees and bumblebees, particularly common carder bees, flock to the tiny creamy-white flowers.

Flowering season: Summer.

Cooking with lemon balm: Lemon balm complements fish. Use the leaves to make lemon balm pesto – whizz them together with pine nuts, olive oil, lemon juice, parmesan cheese and a sprinkling of fresh chives.

Types of herbs: Melissa officinalis – named in honour of honey bees. Melissa means bee in Greek, which in turn comes from Meli (honey).

Materials for the pollination home

If you have chosen to forage and pack your own PES, these are the type of materials you will need: fir cones, bark, moss, twigs, sheep's wool, hollow plant material like bamboo, pheasants berry and maybe bull rushes. You can buy mason bee nesting tubes if you want <https://www.gardening-naturally.com/outdoor-living/wildlife-care/mason-bee-tubes>. You might add an old brick or two for the mason bees. Broken terracotta pots are good too.

Position and maintenance of the PES

Position the PES in full sun, facing south or south east. Try and keep the entrance to the pollinator cabinet clear of big vegetation. Keep it dry at all times, to prevent the contents going mouldy.

Water the herbs to help get them established and during extended dry periods. Ideally use rainwater from a water butt. Some of the herbs such as rosemary, sage, thyme and borage are drought tolerant so once established, avoid over-watering.

Keep an eye on the materials in the pollination station, this might need replacing every few years. At this time we suggest the drilled holes tunnels should be cleaned in the spring*, after the bees have emerged. Keep an eye on your pollination station in the spring to see if bees have emerged. The tunnel will no longer be capped off, but debris will remain inside the tunnel. You might even see a bee come out of the tunnel. At the same time you might choose to replace hollow material like bamboo.

This short YouTube video might help https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBet_OTo13c.

Top tips for ways everyone can help:

- Diversify your garden with organic bulbs and seeds to support pollinators year-round. You could start with spring snowdrops and primroses, or plant trees and shrubs such as cherry-plum, goat willow, blackthorn, plum, wild cherry, crab apple and larger willows.
- Encourage people, including your local council, to support 'No Mow May' and let a part of your garden go wild to support biodiversity.
- Opt for organic choices in clothing, food, beverages, and home and garden products for a chemical-free lifestyle.
- Encourage your council, estate managers, and local farmers to prohibit the use of pesticides and neonics that harm bees on their managed lands.
- Treat yourself to local honey and support beekeepers in your community.

Learn more about our Pollination Education Station project and ways you can help pollinators here: <https://www.sussexgreenliving.org.uk/renature/>