

Using native plants in the garden

Much of the available advice on wildlife friendly gardening suggests that the only places in the garden for native species are a wildflower border, a meadow or a "wild patch". This is definitely not the case in my garden where native plants grow happily alongside plants from all over the world. I grow native plants as a good source of nectar and pollen suitable for our pollinators and as food plants for the caterpillars of many moths and butterflies. For instance Blackthorn shown above hosts the caterpillars of 84 types of moth.



As I have a big garden I can have a Rowan and a Silver Birch but this would be impossible in a smaller garden. There are however plenty of smaller native trees and shrubs such as the Spindle shown opposite with its gorgeous berries. You could also use Tamarisk, Dogwood, Wayfaring tree, Guelder Rose or Dog Rose. These could also be used in a native hedge with other native trees.



The wildflowers in my beds and borders are beautiful as well as good for pollinators. A particular favourite is Purple Toadflax, left, which is also the food plant of the Toadflax brocade moth which you can see in the photo. Bladder Campion, right, has a beautiful froth of delicate flowers.



I also have Ox Eye Daisies and a lovely St John's Wort. My Wild Marjoram is always covered in bees and butterflies and the Honeysuckle smells wonderful while my clump of Devilsbit Scabious is a food plant for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. I allow some wild flowers like the Mallow opposite to pop up where they seed to give me a lovely surprise.



I also leave some weeds, in the lawn of course, but also in the borders such as the Ground Ivy below which provides lots of nectar. I also tolerate some nettles and brambles in the wilder corners as food plants for butterflies and moths. Bramble hosts 66 moth species and nettles host 37.



If you can get more native species into your garden you will be able to enjoy more wildlife, give it a try!

Photos by Vicky Golding, Judith Hatherall and Helen Knell.