



Stick out your tongue ... collecting nectar!

Some plants, such as dandelions, have open, shallow flower heads and many different insects can reach the pollen and nectar to feed. Other flowers such as lavender, have tubular flowers where the nectar is stored deeply. The deeper the nectar is stored, the longer your tongue needs to be to reach it! Bumblebees have longer tongues than most other insects in the British Isles and so they are able to visit deeper flowers. Tongue length varies between bumblebee species with the Garden bumblebee having the longest, up to approximately 1.9cm. It can reach nectar in the deepest of flowers such as honeysuckle and has a long face to house it's long tongue!



Photo credit: Clare Flynn

A Garden bumblebee approaching a flower, with it's long tongue already unfurled.

Growing herbs for long-tongued bees



Many familiar garden herbs have deep tubular flowers which are particularly attractive to bumblebees. They are widely available as seeds or plants in garden centres and relatively easy to grow. Herbs generally like slightly drier free draining soil and are well suited to containers, raised beds or borders, particularly in a sunny spot.

Try to provide flowers for bees **throughout the season!** Here are some easy-to-grow perennial herbs and flowering times:

- Chives May – Jun
- Sage Jun – Aug
- Oregano Jul – Sep
- Lavender Jun – Aug
- Mint (many types) Jul – Oct
- Marjoram Jul – Sep
- Thyme Jun – Jul
- Catnip Jul – Sep

Photo credit: Clare Flynn

Did you know?

Bumblebee species with relatively short tongues cannot reach the nectar in very deep flowers. Instead, they can often be seen biting a hole in the base of the flowers, sticking their tongues through and 'stealing' the nectar without pollinating the flower. **This is known as nectar robbing!**

(below) A Buff-tailed bumblebee nectar robbing comfrey flowers.



Photo credit: Clare Flynn



Practical idea for Herbs

Lavender Sachets

These make a lovely gift! Use to scent clothes, cars etc.

- Cut stems of lavender just as they come into flower – **don't forget to leave some for the bees!** Cut the flowering stem just above the woody part of the plant.
- Dry them on a sunny windowsill or outside in the sun – **don't let them get wet** – for about a week.
- Harvest the flowers by running your fingers along the stem over a bowl. They should drop readily if fully dry.
- Cut 2 pieces of non-fraying cloth, about 15cm square, and stitch securely together on 3 sides. Turn inside out and fill with the dried lavender flowers.
- Secure top with ribbon or string.



Photo credit: Clare Flynn

Growing and giving herbs

Herbs can be grown in the smallest space and make ideal gifts. They can be grown from seed on a sunny windowsill or from propagation of cuttings.

Try recycling to create imaginative planters. Wash any containers and put in holes for drainage. How about using old...

- paint pots.
- wellies or boots.
- catering tins (make sure there are **no sharp bits!**).
- tyres or animal feed tubs for larger planters?

Mint sauce

Great for lamb, potatoes or peas!

You need: one cup of finely chopped mint leaves, half a cup of vinegar, 2 tbsp water, 2 tbsp of sugar.

1. Bring water & vinegar to boil, add mint and sugar and simmer for 5 mins.
2. Decant into **sterilised** small bottles or jars and label. Shake before use.
3. Store in fridge for **up to a month**.



For more information on growing herbs visit: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/Advice/profile?PID=639>

For lots of great information on spotting bumblebees, visit: bumblebeeconservation.org

Why not try...

- A fresh sprig of rosemary or sage in a bottle of olive oil. The flavour will infuse!
- Fresh herbs on homemade pizza – in Italy they often use oregano!



All activities should be carried out with standard **Health and Safety and Risk Assessment** procedures. Children should not carry out any of these activities without responsible adult supervision and some activities using tools may be unsuitable for younger children.

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