

Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers Making a difference

It can be dispiriting hearing all the bad news about biodiversity loss – 97% of wildflower meadows lost, an insect apocalypse, and shocking declines in bird species. More and more houses being built destroying yet more habitats, one of the biggest causes of biodiversity loss. But just recently I've been heartened by some good news locally. First, I was invited by the Tice's Meadow Bird Group to the world premiere of a wonderful short film called *Our Meadow*, made by local film-maker Josh Guyan. Many people in the area will know of the struggles to keep this important nature reserve from the hands of developers, and it was down to a small group of dedicated volunteers to refuse to give up fighting for it, with the happy result that six councils, led by Surrey County Council, agreed to buy the site. The film celebrated the wildlife, but, above all, the people who made it happen.

Then I saw a post on the Blacknest Fields Facebook page that an adult brown hairstreak butterfly had been found! These butterflies are listed by Butterfly Conservation as a High Priority species, and the butterfly in question was found on blackthorn, which had been purposefully allowed to grow on the site for them – what a result for the team of volunteers who have worked so hard on nature recovery at the site.



We can all make a difference, especially in our gardens. According to the RHS, our gardens make up an area twice the size of Somerset and can make a positive difference to biodiversity loss. They suggest planting perennials (trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants), plant for pollinators, garden without pesticides, let lawns grow naturally and make a pond. The reward is to see wildlife of all shapes and sizes using your garden – and happiness is seeing a bee visit a flower you planted just for them!



Pollinator plant of the month – *Salvia 'Amistad'*

Avid readers of this column might remember that I have long coveted this tall bushy perennial with beautiful deep purple tubular flowers. I planted one in my border for the first time this year and it has done splendidly, although I was initially disappointed not to see more bees on it – they seemed to prefer the humble toadflax which self-seeds all over my garden! Now that is over, they have finally turned their attention to 'Amistad' which will continue flowering until the first frosts. I will take cuttings as insurance but I hope it will make it through the winter.

Other November plants for pollinators

Winter-flowering honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) is a good source of nectar for late-flying bees, including the common carder bumblebee (*Bombus pascuorum*) which can be active into November. I have also seen these tough little bees with their gingery thoraxes on my hardy fuchsias and geraniums. At the time of writing, I have just divided my *Geranium psilostemon*, a terrific plant with its black-centred magenta flowers but which had grown a little too vigorously for its position! Most hardy geraniums are easy to grow and all are good for pollinators – a small unnamed variety has been quietly flowering again recently and getting a lot of attentions from the bees!

