

## Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

### Christmas without pollinators

Last year we entered our first ever Christmas tree festival at St Peter's in Wrecclesham. The theme for our tree was 'Christmas without pollinators'. We decorated our tree with all the foods we would not have at Christmas without our pollinators. Just look at this list!



🐝 **Vegetables and herbs** – carrots, parsnips, onions, brussels sprouts. Most vegetable seeds are pollinated by insects

🐝 **Fruit and nuts** - satsumas, oranges, lemons, apples, dried fruits such as currants, sultanas and raisins, nuts like almonds, walnuts and sweet chestnuts – which means no Christmas pud or mince pies!

🐝 **CHOCOLATE!** See Pollinator plant of the month below

🐝 **Roasties and crisps** - no sunflower oil to cook them in!

🐝 **Holly and ivy** for decoration, plus no kissing under the mistletoe!

🐝 **Candles** made from beeswax from hard-working honey bees

We also decorated the tree with flowers and bees, and on the top of the tree was – the Queen Bee!

### Pollinator plant of the month – Cacao (cocoa) tree

Native to South America, none of us are going to be growing this in our gardens (Kew have some in the Princess of Wales' conservatory), but I thought it would be fun to have 'the chocolate tree' as our pollinator plant of the month, as its cocoa beans are used to make chocolate, a real Christmas treat. There is a serious message here though. The Cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*) is almost exclusively pollinated by a certain type of midge, but according to the Natural History Museum, cocoa is 'experiencing a perfect storm of threats and is at risk of losing its pollinator'. The solution, as ever, is to limit the worst effects of climate change through reducing greenhouse gas emissions, whilst preserving and restoring habitats.

### Other December plants for pollinators (which we *can* grow!)

Winter-flowering Mahonia (*Mahonia japonica*), is a lifeline for winter-active bumblebees such as the Buff-tailed bumblebee (*Bombus Terrestris*), as more queens produced during the summer establish nests in the autumn instead of going into hibernation, a result of climate change. Workers from these nests forage on a range of winter flowering plants, so gardeners can really help these bees affected by climate change. Other useful plants include winter-flowering honeysuckle (*Lonicera fragrantissima*) and winter flowering heather (*Erica carnea*).