Tips on Garden Plants for Bees

compiled by the Southland Bee Society

Bees and beneficial insects prefer to forage in sheltered and sunny garden areas.

Group Planting

Choose varieties of the same plant that have different flowering periods throughout the year, *example* - hebes, flaxes, corokia, cherry blossom, lavenders, etc. Grouping same plant varieties together creates a sheltered habitat for insects and bees, as well as giving colour and interest in the garden for a longer period of time.

Flowering Period

Consider planting plants, shrubs and small trees that offer pollen and nectar on the shoulder of the flowering season ie late Winter, early Spring and late Autumn, early Winter. Some examples are
Viburnum Eve Princes – makes a great hedge and is covered in flowers from June to Sept. Thick dark green leaves with pink tinged buds, white flowers – very showy and easy to clip.
Tree Lucerne - flowers from late Winter to late Autumn with lovely soft green foliage and cascades of white flowers, a bees delight. Frost tender when establishing.
Herb Winter Savory – tastes like a combination of rosemary/thyme and is covered in white flowers from Feb to April. Bees will forage from early morning to late evening. Ideal ground cover when planted on mass with thyme and chives which creates a flowering edible carpet, from Spring through to mid Autumn. Your local nursery is a great place to start and they will help you with plant selection and flowering periods.

Allow those vegies to flower

Flowering seed heads of Autumn and Winter Brassicas are a rich and plentiful source of nectar during the colder months and are the first call for foraging bees. While the tiny yellow flowers will never feature in floral arrangements they do offer the more relaxed gardener a source of fresh seed to sow come late Spring and fantastic food for bees at any time of the year.   Flowering seeds heads of garlic, leeks, carrots and parsnips offer elevated drama to the vegie patch and on calm sunny days the bees are joined by many more beneficial insects jiving from floret to floret.

The observations of a beekeeper/ gardener on a lifestyle block.

Since becoming a beekeeper my idea of the "perfect garden" has changed dramatically. Three years on from the first hive arriving on our property, there appears to be a balance in the garden, everything seems to be in harmony. Allowing plants in the vegie plot to flower and go to seed has created a spray free environment in that Nature is in control and in balance with itself.
By helping the Honey Bee through planting and not using chemical sprays, the beneficial insects now have a year round habitat in which to flourish. I must admit letting the plants complete their natural cycle is not for those that like order, however the benefits far out way the visual disorder. Collecting seeds for the next season, harvesting delicious honey for ones toast and the delight of the varied array of insects dancing against the late afternoon sun, are some of the delightful benefits our garden provides us with.
Let the cycle go full circle and enjoy the benefits.

Planting shelter belts and riparian margins with natives and exotics for bee and insect fodder

compiled by the Southland Bee Society

In the past preference was given to fast growing evergreen types of trees for shelter belts, research has shown that while these are effective for shelter this type of mono planting offers very little ecological diversity and may require costly maintenance and be unpalatable to stock and offer little or no fodder for insects or bees. Shelter is vital to maintaining animal welfare during our often serve Southland and Otago Winters and once planted a farmer is reluctant to remove a well-established traditional shelter belt.

When embarking on planning and selecting plants for shelter belts consideration should be given to diversity of planting for the conditions. Other aspects which should also be considered are maintenance costs, deciduous or evergreen, hardiness of type and orientation of planting ie; evergreen North / South, deciduous East / West, but most importantly year round fodder for insects, birds and farm animals.

If replacing or considering planting a shelter belt our native plants and trees as well as many exotics offer cost effective alternatives to the traditional Cupressus x leylandii / macrocarpa and Pinus spp. shelter belts with the added benefits of stock fodder in dry conditions, mineral boost for stock from trimmings, soil nutrient tonic from leaf fall in Autumn, shade and shelter.

When planning and planting a shelter belt consider using a combination of willows, poplars, hebes, flax, pittosporum, five finger, acacia, eucalypts and many of the other flowering natives and exotic trees as well as shrubs to create a diverse habitat for beneficial insects, bees, birds and farm animals year round, not to mention the visual aesthetic changes throughout the seasons.

Many local nurseries offer comprehensive advice on shelter belt and riparian plant selection with a design service. Listed below are a few links for resources, ideas and research documents to help you get started. Our planting guide has a list of natives and some exotics with information on flowering periods.

Perhaps it's time to think outside the square by combining natives and exotics, in doing so, will help enhance ecological diversity on pastoral land here in Southland and Otago.

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www.es.govt.nz (publications-factsheets and summaries-riparian plants for Southland)
www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz
www.treesforbeesnz.org publications Winning with Willows, How to Plant Trees for Bees on Farms
www.fedfarm.org.nz/treesforbees
www.treecrops.org.nz
www.landcare.org.nz
www.nzpcn.org.nz/publications/Harakeke-Report06.pdf

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www.diacks.co.nz
www.pukeraunursery.co.nz
www.greenmachine.co.nz
www.plantsdirect.co.nz
www.theplantstore.co.nz
hollowayenvironmentalservices@gmail.com
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