

1 BULBS FOR POLLINATORS

By carefully choosing the bulbs, corms and tubers we order now, gardeners can help provide pollinators with a reliable source of nectar. We select some of the best

WORDS ADAM HUNT



Insects began their pollinating love affair with plants more than 100 million years ago, and as this relationship has evolved plants have cleverly adapted to entice insects through increasingly complex and exquisite flowers laced with a dual offering of sugary nectar and protein-rich pollen. The co-operation has been so successful it is now thought that around 80 per cent of land-based plants across the world are totally dependent on these pollinating insects whose numbers continue to fall, research suggests, as a result of the use of pesticides, climate change and the loss of wildflower habitats.

As gardeners we can help reverse this by providing a diverse offering of flowering plants across as long a season as possible, and bulbs, such as crocuses, snowdrops and nerines that flower outside of the usual temperate growing season, are a vital food source. They might help an emerging queen bumblebee in early

February or a small tortoiseshell butterfly fooled into waking up on an unusually warm day in midwinter.

Research has shown that insects are less concerned about whether their chosen plant is native to their locality or not, but they do fare better with species plants rather than cultivars or hybrids, as species flowers have more nectar and pollen. Species bulbs work well alongside a naturalistic planting style for borders and wildflower areas, whatever the size of a garden, and many of the species bulbs naturalise freely, creating easy to manage, early wildflower areas on lawns or under the dappled shade of fruit trees.

Species bulbs also make up the bulk of those included here. Some cultivars have crept in but all are favourites, chosen for their beauty, reliability and for their value to our wonderful and so important foraging insects in all their many forms.

WINTER AND EARLY SPRING

1 *Anemone nemorosa*

Impressive as a block of single colour. Plant in glades, under shrubs and in pots alongside one of the later snowdrops. One of our most delicate-looking native flowers. Flowers early March. 13-15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b†.

2 *Crocus x luteus* 'Golden Yellow'

Crocuses are one of the earliest nectar-rich flowers in spring, sought out by emerging queen bumblebees. The rich yellow of this cultivar works well against the low light levels of March. Grow in well-drained soil on a site that has sun in summer to bake the corms. March. 8-10cm. AGM*. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

3 *Galanthus nivalis*

One of the first flowers that dares to show its head in January or February. At its best seen in large swathes carpeting the floors of woodland or the sole occupant of a pot. Its form is strangely similar to a sycamore key, and just beautiful. Mainly pure white with fresh green foliage. Late January to early February. 10cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-7b.

4 *Eranthis hyemalis*

One of the first blooms to appear in January and much loved by bees during dry weather. Best planted in humus-rich, alkaline soil that does not dry out in summer. It will establish and naturalise under deciduous trees in light grass. Plant in the green for best success. Mid to late January. 15cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-7b.

5 *Anemone blanda* 'White Splendour'

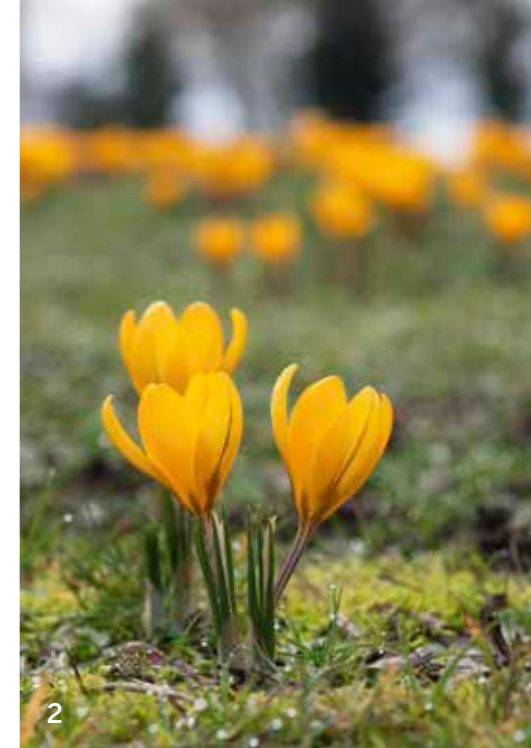
One of the wilder woodland anemones, it has pinkish-toned buds opening to reveal pure-white petals with masses of pollen-covered stamens. Plant under deciduous trees where they will receive plenty of light and moisture early on in spring. March. 15cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

6 *Galanthus elwesii*

As one of the last snowdrops to flower in the season. It is a good one to combine with crocus or scilla whose blooms soon follow. If the weather is fine snowdrops will be appreciated by honeybees and hoverflies. February to March depending on weather. 12-20cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-7b.

7 *Crocus olivieri* subsp. *balansae* 'Orange Monarch'

Named after the monarch butterfly, this is a new cultivar I can strongly recommend. The blooms are a beautiful orange – electric without being too loud – and create an exciting atmosphere in an open, naturalised planting scheme. March. 15cm.



1 & 7 JUNIORS BILDARCHIV GMBH, CHRIS BURROWS / BOTH ALAMY STOCK PHOTO.
2, & 5 TIM GAINEY, TORIE CHLUGG / BOTH GAP PHOTOS. 3, 4 & 6 JASON INGRAM.
†Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. Hardiness ratings given where available.



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SPRING

1 *Scilla 'Blue Giant'*

Blue, star-like flowers with bright, white centres. An easy bulb to grow on loam soil given morning sun and afternoon shade. It loves a seaweed feed when in active growth. Late March. 15cm.

2 *Tulipa humilis* var. *pulchella* **Albocaerulea Oculata Group**

This dwarf tulip is a rare and special variety that works best tucked into pots, rockeries or little crannies where it is easily viewed as well as accessible to pollinators. Delicate white and violet blue in tones. Combines well with similar petite bulbs such as scilla and woodland anemone. April. 45cm. RHS H5.

3 *Fritillaria meleagris*

Fritillaries grow well in damp, humus-rich soil that is free draining and can naturalise happily in grasslands or meadow conditions. Start them off in pots, with five bulbs in a 9cm pot, then as foliage appears in spring, carefully remove the bulbs with as little root disturbance as possible, and plant into their final position. Plant with *F. pyrenaica* and *F. meleagris* var. *unicolor* subvar. *alba*, which also enjoy the same conditions. April. 30cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

4 *Scilla siberica*

This scilla is the best performer for naturalising in light lawns and part-shade. The blue nodding bell flower begins before other scillas have started and has a long blooming period. A rewarding bulb, producing more than one stem from each bulb. We love to plant it under magnolias and deciduous shrubs such as *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Mariesii'. March to April. 15cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 2a-8b.

5 *Muscari armeniacum* 'Valerie Finnis'

While all muscari are attractive to bees, *M. armeniacum* is the most favoured and a better choice than *M. neglectum*, which can sometimes be more invasive. In full bloom it can attract gangs of honeybees and other pollinators, such as plume moths and solitary bees. We love 'Valerie Finnis' for its paler blue colour. Naturalise in grasslands to disguise the foliage and create an early spring carpet of blue. March. 16cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

6 *Narcissus 'Minnow'*

A sweet and dainty miniature narcissus from the Tazetta group but unlike other Tazettas this one will naturalise in fine grass and humus-rich soil. Deadhead religiously when the flower goes over, leaving the foliage to die down naturally. Early April. 20cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.

7 *Tulipa clusiana*

Tulips are not renowned as plants for pollinators, but they are such an essential element of a spring garden, and if you include just one, then the lady tulip is possibly the best. Its flowers have attractive dark-pink stripes on its outer petals that widen in the sunshine to produce a star, and the stunning purple markings on its basal stem are sheer beauty. Best to plant deeply in a shaded area. Mid-April. 30-45cm. AGM. RHS H6.

8 *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *suksdorfii*

The North American wild hyacinth; this species comes in many beautiful tones of blues as well as whites. Unbeatable in clump form, naturalises in damp, fertile grass in sun or preferably light shade. Pairs beautifully with *Narcissus poeticus* in a meadow or planting scheme. I also like to use *Camassia quamash*, which is neater and bluer. May. 80cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.

9 *Erythronium californicum* 'White Beauty'

Delicate, pendular white flowers elegantly hang above mottled leaves. Flowers hang downwards to protect pollen from rain and are as much loved by honey bees, bumble bees and solitary bees as by gardeners. They prefer a slightly acidic, humus-rich soil. Plant in light shade alongside *Anemone nemorosa* and *Corydalis flexuosa* for a beautiful spring combination. April. 15cm. AGM. RHS H5.

10 *Ornithogalum umbellatum*

A lovely example of our native flora, the species is a superb pollinator and an often under-explored delight. Fantastic naturalising bulbs for wild places, borders and pots with long lasting blooms for vases. Plant alongside cowslips and narcissi. Early May. 25cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-9b.

11 *Narcissus poeticus*

This sweet-scented, elegant narcissus has swept-back, pure-white petals with a red rimmed yellow cup centre. With a longer stem in comparison to its flowerhead it creates such elegance. If it dries out fully its flower will abort, so plant 20cm deep in damper soil. Dislikes disturbance. Often sold as *N. poeticus* var. *recurvus*. Late April to early May. 55cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-7b.

12 *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

A dramatic show of wild bluebell carpets makes a walk in woodlands a pleasurable spring tradition. In the garden these English bluebells can be planted along hedges and under trees in partial shade. Much loved and savoured by brimstone butterflies and solitary bees. Late April to early May. 35cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.



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1 & 2 TOMMY TONSEBERG, VISIONS PREMIUM / BOTH GAP PHOTOS; 3 RICHARD BLOOM; 4 & 6 GIPX, CAN. JOHN MARTIN / BOTH ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; 5 RACHEL WARNE.

7 & 9 FIONA RICE, JONATHAN BUCKLEY, MARK BOLTON / ALL GAP PHOTOS; 8, 10 & 12 JOHN MARTIN, OLEG BELOV, ANDREW CHAMBERLAIN / ALL ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



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LATE SPRING, SUMMER AND AUTUMN

1 *Allium moly* 'Jeannine'

One of the best sources of pollen and nectar in equal quantities, alliums are also a lot of fun. This one has a golf ball head with yellow stars and is much loved by butterflies and humming bird moths. May to June. 20cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b.

2 *Allium siculum*

Hard to germinate organically, but I adore it; as do bees. Tall stems reveal clusters of cream and bronze bells. Plant in wilder areas with shorter grasses, such as *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Early May. 85cm.

3 *Allium cristophii*

Large spherically shaped heads, each packed with star-like, pinkish-purple flowers, offer rich provisions for bees, moths and butterflies. Stems are short and flowerheads heavy, so provide support through an underplanting of, for example, *Stipa tenuissima* or a low-growing lavender. June. 60cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

4 *Lilium martagon* var. *cattaniae*

Turk's cap flowers with petals so dark and shiny they almost glow – truly an artist's flower. These are fragrant bulbs that attract nocturnal pollinators, such as night moths and bats, who eat insects from the flowers as well as drinking nectar. Late June. 60cm.

5 *Nerine bowdenii* 'Patricia'

A dormant summer bulbous perennial that blooms in late September and flowers into November. The leafless stems elegantly rise, where the buds explode into a wavy, recurved, nine-petaled flower. In colder areas *N. undulata* 'Alba' offers even later and longer blooms. Late September. 50-70cm.

6 *Colchicum autumnale*

This has nectar that is only accessible to insects with a long proboscis. Pollinators include moths and butterflies. Works best in damp, fertile meadows but its also suited to gardens with similar conditions. September. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

7 *Lilium pyrenaicum*

Its scent is not to everyone's liking but bees and moths love it. Easy to grow, quick to clump in neutral or slightly alkaline soil. A good option for naturalising in lightly shaded grassland. June. 50cm.

• Gardens Illustrated readers can receive 10 per cent off a selection of spring-flowering bulbs from Organic Bulbs. Turn to page 106 for details, and turn the page for some of our favourite bulb suppliers.

1, 4, 5, 6 & 7 TORIE CHIGGS; ANNAICK GILBERT; JOHN GLOVER; CHRIS COGGINS; TIM GANEY / ALL CAP PHOTOS; 2 & 3 JASON INGRAM



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