

## Confined to the Garden week 9

I try to do at least one thing every year to improve my garden for wildlife. This year, I am able to do more than just one thing, as I have a bit of extra time and money to spend on it thanks to Coronavirus. This year's goal is to make the garden a better place for pollinators. This means flowers, lots more flowers. My ultimate aspiration is to have something flowering in the garden in every month of the year. Realistically, I'm not going to achieve that within this year but I'm certainly going to try to increase the amount of pollen and nectar on offer.

Click here to find out why this is so important and how you can do your bit:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-and-wild-places/saving-species/save-bees-and-pollinators>

A few weeks ago, I ordered some plug plants from an online supplier. They arrived this weekend, so I sprung into action and got them planted. They are specially selected to create a low flowering lawn. According to [www.wildflowerlawnsandmeadows.com](http://www.wildflowerlawnsandmeadows.com): *"These wild flowers will tolerate a regular mowing regime and so you can maintain a short mown lawn yet still enjoy all the benefits of colourful wild flowers. The plants I have selected for this plug collection flower lower down on short stems and flower quite prolifically and resume flowering quite quickly following mowing. Plant them straight into your lawn and maintain a mowing height of about 2 inches to create a fabulous wild flower lawn, great for bees, butterflies and humans!"* Sounds easy enough, and perfect for turning my unkempt patch of grass into a colourful feature with loads of nectar and pollen for those pollinators. The mix contains the following species: Common Knapweed; Cowslip; Greater Birds-foot-trefoil; Lady's Bedstraw; Lawn Chamomile; Lawn Daisy; Meadow Vetchling; Oxeye Daisy; Red Clover; Selfheal; White Clover; Wild Thyme; Yarrow; Ragged Robin; Wild Marjoram.



Freshly delivered plug plants

My first task was to cut the existing 'lawn' very short so that the tiny new plants have a chance to establish before having to compete with grasses.



Before

After

Then I marked out where to put the plants. I avoided the edges because they are in almost constant shade. If I'm lucky, some of the plants will spread outwards and eventually fill these areas too.



Bamboo markers

Next, I whittled a dibber and used it to make 60 small holes in the lawn. It hasn't rained much this spring, so the ground was hard and dry. I watered the area generously before planting. This should help the plants spread their roots.



My dibber

Then I was ready to plant out my little plugs. I left the marker sticks in place to help me remember where they all are, because they are so tiny. This time, I diligently followed all the instructions. I paid good money for these plants, so I want them all to survive! With that in mind I watered them thoroughly that evening and every evening since.



Planting out my plugs



Plants in the ground

I will need to water them every day for the first few weeks, unless we get some rain to do it for me. Once established they should make a big difference to the amount of native flowers available for my pollinators. I'm hoping that my lawn will end up looking a little something like this...



Picture from plant supplier's website: <https://www.wildflowerlawnsandmeadows.com>

At the start of the lockdown I unearthed some old packets of seed I had been given. They were all well past their 'use-by' dates, so I gave them an overdue chance to germinate, but mostly ignored any instructions on the packets. Some of them have done well, others not so much.

One of the wildflower mixes I used for my mini-meadows has done better than the other and is starting to look like it might turn out well.



Mini meadow 1



Mini meadow 2

I put a mix of pleasantly scented wildflowers into one of the pots that make up the Hedgehog feeding station. It was looking a bit neglected, so I emptied it out, put all the good soil back in and scattered these seeds on the surface. They're doing really well, although it looks like only one species is thriving and I'm not sure which one.



Scented seedlings

I put some Buddleia seed into small trays. Not much has appeared, but there are just a few tiny seedlings popping up. I have no idea whether these are Buddleia or just some other random thing blown into the tray on the wind. I'll have to wait and see as they get bigger.



Buddleia seedlings, or something else?

I also tried to germinate some Mint and Oregano. There has been no sign of life in these pots yet, but they are a couple of weeks behind the rest, so I'll give them a bit more time before I write them off.



Herb seeds

As well as my own efforts to increase my flower power, the usual opportunists are starting to bloom wherever they can. Some people might call these 'weeds' but I don't really subscribe to that concept. Just because I didn't ask them to grow there, doesn't mean they're not lovely plants in their own right. Plus, they are providing loads of pollen for the mason bees to carry away to the bee hotels. As well as the weeds, there are some pretty flowers I inherited from the previous occupants of the house, and even a few I planted myself. Here are some of the flowers blooming in my garden at the moment:



Herb Robert



Creeping Buttercup



Blue Flag Iris



Thrift



Helianthemum



Sedum



Australian Daisy

Flowers are nice, and pollinators are important, but I always get most excited to see mammals visiting my garden. There has been plenty of nocturnal action picked up on the cameras this week.

I hadn't seen much of 3Paws the vixen for the last few weeks, she has been busy raising cubs elsewhere. This week though, she has visited a few times. It looks as though she is weaning her cubs now. I'm still hoping to see them accompanying her on a visit to my garden this summer. She came alone one morning this week at about 5am and my CCTV camera captured some lovely colour images of her. As you can see below, she is in good condition and actually looks healthier than most of the four-pawed foxes around here.



3Paws

Very occasionally, I put out food scraps for foxes. This week, we had a hard-boiled egg going spare. It was out there a good few days before it was discovered, but 3Paws still seemed to enjoy it once she found it.

If you'd like to see a video of 3Paws enjoying her egg, click the link below:

<https://youtu.be/NISVs3ehp3A>

She kept coming back to see if there was anything else available, so I've been putting some of the Hedgehogs' leftovers in a bowl outside of the feeding station to keep her interested and encourage her to bring her cubs here. One night, she arrived to find a Hedgehog already eating from the bowl. She tried to share nicely, but then got pricked on the nose and didn't want to share any more. She used her foot to pull the bowl towards her and away from the Hedgehog, so she could eat in peace.

To see a video of this, click the link below:

<https://youtu.be/AqrgF3NCvtE>

In general, 3Paws leaves the hogs alone. She has been known to try her luck but, so far, she has always failed to catch one.

To see a video of this, click the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzXA7qoReyU>

The Hedgehogs are still shoving each other around and doing epic courtship dances. Now they're also having to navigating the maze of bamboo marker sticks that I'm using to locate my new plants. I'm sure the hogs are not impressed with how short I've cut the grass, but I hope they'll appreciate the extra invertebrates that my flowering lawn will host when it gets established.



Navigating the maze

This week's first video clip is of an unfortunate hog who gets violently shoved into the food bowl and ends up on his back. He had some trouble flipping over but he did right himself, eventually.

Click the link below to see this clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnCbAaBXDig>

My second clip this week shows a Hedgehog putting up with being pushed around repeatedly by another hog who, it seems, just can't leave it alone.

Click the link below to see this clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP9uR8hXggU>

And finally, a thirsty Hedgehog who slipped while drinking from the edge of the pond and had to act fast to avoid a dunking.

Click the link below to see this clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GthmYNMu5w>

Check back here next week for more updates on plants, animals and projects in my garden.