

## Growing a wildflower container for pollinators

Watch James McNish's video at [How to grow a wildflower pot for pollinators](https://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/conservation/conservation-action/conservation-action-articles/how-to-grow-a-wildflower-pot-for-pollinators) / [Natural History Museum \(nhm.ac.uk\)](https://www.nhm.ac.uk).

Growing native wildflowers is an excellent way to provide the right food for pollinating insects, making life better for your local wildlife. No garden? You can grow wildflowers in a container. You'll be able to enjoy a burst of colourful and interesting flowers while watching visiting bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

It's best to start in the spring or autumn. You will need:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A suitable pot, trough or planter for your space, with drainage holes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peat-free compost and garden soil</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rocks, stones or broken crocks for drainage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wildflower seeds (see below about choosing which you want)</li></ul>

### 1. Prepare your pot



Your pot needs good drainage – the soil mustn't become waterlogged. A layer of rocks and stones in the base prevents soil from blocking the holes.

Use a mix of equal amounts of soil and compost. Wildflowers prefer nutrient-poor soil. Leave about a good space at the top so you can water without washing out the soil. Water well and allow excess water to drain out.

### 2. Sow your seeds

Sprinkle seeds thinly and evenly on the surface of the soil. Wildflower seeds are often tiny. Mixing with dry compost, vermiculite or horticultural sand will help you to sow thinly. Press the seeds down onto the wet soil. You could deter birds by covering with a thin layer of your soil/compost mix and just dampen it.

### 3. Germination and growth

Place your pot in a sunny spot and leave to grow. Gently water just enough so the pot doesn't dry out, but don't overdo it! Your plants will flower at different times, depending on what's in your chosen seed mix. Some may not flower the first year.

### 4. Maintaining your wildflower planter

Once the flowers have bloomed and faded, leave them to go to seed. You can collect the seeds and use them for another pot. Once everything has flowered, cut the plant growth to around 2.5 centimetres high and it will regrow next year.

The next year, your perennial plants will flower again. Depending on your seed mix, different species may predominate but you could replace some



with other seed if you want a different mix. Weed out vigorous invasive plants that might take over from your wildflowers.

### Choosing wildflower seeds for your pot

Use a supplier that sells native UK wildflowers. Otherwise, the flowers included may be less attractive to local wildlife. Many commercially available 'wildflower' mixes include non-native species. These may be pretty, but won't provide the same benefit to wildlife. In a container, you'll want 100% wildflower seeds rather than a mix with grasses.



Many mixes contain colourful native annuals, such as poppies and cornflowers, which live at field margins rather than meadows. These will provide a burst of colour in the first year, but disappear in later years as perennial species come through. Mixing annuals with perennials (see our wildflower lists) will give you early flowers with longer term, more robust flowers. This gives lasting colour and biodiversity. Re-sow annuals (collect your own seeds!) each year to continue that mix. Don't dig up bulbs or take lots of seeds from wild-growing flowers.

### Some tips:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your wildflowers can be annual (one year only) or perennial (return every year), but mixing them gives a long flowering season</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If planting several containers, it's best to use the same wildflowers in each. Pollinators can then move between containers.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Native Spring bulbs are great. They can be left in the container and other wildflowers planted on top</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The (peat-free!) soil in the container shouldn't be too high in nitrogen – wildflowers prefer poor soil</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try to choose wildflowers with a mix of heights to get a good display</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Different flowering times across the season increases the variety of wildlife.</li></ul>

**Wildflowers (and a few garden relatives) to grow in containers that will be flowery and provide good food for pollinators and other invertebrates**

<b>Low/lower growing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Birdsfoot trefoil: yellow</li><li>• Dog violet: purple</li><li>• Wild strawberry: white</li><li>• Primrose (wild!): pale yellow</li><li>• Wild thyme: purple</li><li>• Red clover: dark pink</li><li>• Lady’s bedstraw: yellow</li><li>• Hedge bedstraw: white</li><li>• Harebell: blue</li><li>• Coltsfoot: Yellow</li><li>• Lesser celandine: yellow (disappears after May)</li><li>• Red clover: pink/red</li><li>• Wood anemone: white</li><li>• Tufted vetch: purple</li><li>• Rock rose: yellow</li><li>• Cranesbills: pink / purple</li></ul>	<b>Taller growing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wild marjoram: purple</li><li>• Spiked speedwell (Veronica spicata): purple</li><li>• Field scabious: blue</li><li>• Greater knapweed: purple</li><li>• Lesser knapweed: purple</li><li>• Red campion: pink</li><li>• Toadflax: yellow</li><li>• Oxeye daisy: white / yellow</li><li>• Viper’s bugloss: blue</li><li>• White campion: white</li><li>• Sainfoin: pink</li><li>• Kidney Vetch: yellow</li><li>• Feverfew: white</li><li>• Lungwort: blue</li><li>• Catmint (Nepeta): lavender blue</li><li>• Verbascum: yellow/pink</li><li>• Salvias: purple, pink, blue</li><li>• Fleabane: UK native is yellow</li><li>• Foxglove (biennial): pink/purple, white</li><li>• Hemp agrimony (tall!): pink / purple</li><li>• Hollyhock (Alcea rosea) (tall!): pink</li></ul>									
<b>Annuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poppy: red</li><li>• Cornflower: blue</li><li>• Corn chamomile: white/yellow</li><li>• Corncockle: pink / purple</li><li>• Corn marigold: yellow</li><li>• Fernleaf fiddleneck (Phacelia): lilac</li><li>• Forget-me-not: blue</li><li>• Evening primrose: yellow</li><li>• Great mullein (v. tall biennial): yellow</li></ul>	<b>Bulbs:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Winter aconites: golden yellow</li><li>• Snowdrops: white</li><li>• Wild daffodils: pale yellow</li><li>• Grape hyacinths: dark purple</li><li>• Snakeshead fritillaria: purple</li><li>• Squill (spring / autumn): blue</li></ul>									
<b>Herbs for culinary / household use as well as being great for pollinators</b> <table><tr><td>• Sage</td><td>• Rosemary</td><td>• Thyme</td></tr><tr><td>• Chives</td><td>• Wild marjoram</td><td>• Hyssop</td></tr><tr><td>• Lavender</td><td>• Wild basil</td><td>• Chamomile</td></tr></table>		• Sage	• Rosemary	• Thyme	• Chives	• Wild marjoram	• Hyssop	• Lavender	• Wild basil	• Chamomile
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To help you choose, look at the images at: <a href="https://diversegardens.co.uk/wildflowers/wildflower-gallery/">diversegardens.co.uk/wildflowers/wildflower-gallery/</a>										