



## GROUPS

Examples from left to right: Ashburnham Place wildflowers – Regina Ebner, Common poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) Colin Conroy, St Madoc Centre wildflowers – Regina Ebner, Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinalis*) Norman Crowson

# Native wildflowers

Information: Phil Leigh

### All about wildflowers

- What's not to love about UK wildflowers? They are beautiful to look at and soothing to the soul. Many have long been known to have medicinal properties and, most importantly, they have multiple functions in the natural world.
- **Soil:** Where wildflowers grow, soil is stabilized by complex root systems. This helps prevent soil erosion, retains water reducing run-off during heavy rain and prevents the leaching of nutrients from soils into water courses. By binding carbon in to the soil, wildflowers also help to slow the effects of climate change.
- **Wildlife:** Native wildflowers have been part of the evolutionary processes that have shaped the UK's fauna and flora over millennia. Relationships which have developed between the UK's native wildflower and wildlife species are complex and intertwined. Wildflowers provide wildlife with shelter, a place to breed and food from stems, leaves, pollen, nectar and seeds. In return, pollinating insects pollinate wildflowers whilst insects, birds and animals disperse wildflower seeds so spreading them far and wide.
- **Humans:** In addition to the aesthetic and medicinal properties of wildflowers, at least 80% of our crop species require pollination so that they can set seed. Threats to pollinating insects can therefore also threaten our ability to feed ourselves.

### Why do wildflowers need our help?

97% of the UK's wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930s. This decline in wildflower habitats has come about largely through changes in farming practices, land development and the processes of urbanisation. Changes in trends in gardening have also greatly reduced the availability of wildflowers for pollinators, for example, use of herbicides, harsh mowing regimes and a switch to concrete, slabs and 'plastic grass'.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The dandelion, a common lawn 'weed', provides food for pollinators that is especially vital in early spring. Dandelions get their name from the French name dent-de-lion, meaning 'lion's tooth' and have many colloquial names including 'pee-a-beds' with children being warned not to pick them because of the powerful diuretic effects of their roots. However, the whole of the plant is edible and nutritious for people and it has been cultivated throughout history for human consumption. The seed heads of dandelions have long been blown by children as a fun way of predicting the time...(blow) one o'clock...(blow) two o'clock...(blow) three o'clock!

### How can we help?

- Encourage the growth of UK wildflowers whether you have influence over a plant pot, a window box, a garden, a church yard, a park, a large farm or a vast private estate, whenever you can.
- Sow wildflower seeds in a pot or a meadow.
- Change mowing regimes to allow lawn 'weeds' to flower even in a small patch of grass.
- Change horticultural/agricultural practices to promote the reestablishment of species-rich grassland.
- Do not use herbicides and fertilisers in your garden to promote a more diverse lawn.
- Allowing UK wildflowers to grow will help to close the gap and provide corridors between our disjointed patchwork of wildflower habitats. This will help to promote and sustain healthy populations of UK pollinating insects. Therefore if you don't already, learn to love and embrace UK wildflowers and let them grow!

### Learn more

- The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has provided a Plants for Pollinators label to help choose UK native wildflowers to grow. It is important to focus on native species as these best serve our native UK wildlife. Non-native species can be invasive, sometimes outcompeting native plants: [rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators](https://rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators)
- Here is a list of wildflower plants to grow and a great source of information, seeds and plants: [wildflower.co.uk](https://wildflower.co.uk)
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at [naturalist@arocha.org](mailto:naturalist@arocha.org)

### Recommended species:

- Common poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*): Beautiful to look at and good for butterflies and bees.
- Evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*): Though introduced to the UK in the 1600's this wildflower has had long enough to become naturalised and is highly attractive to moths. With flowers that open in the evening, evening primrose is also beneficial to bats that feed on the moths.
- Vipers bugloss (*Echium vulgare*): These striking blue flowers are attractive to bumble bees and day flying moths.