Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers

Rewilding – where do you draw the line?

I last wrote about rewilding a couple of years ago, and I have been trying to garden with a light touch and letting nature take the lead. The problem is, nature is untidy, and sometimes, not beautiful. I recently visited Knepp Rewilding Project in West Sussex, and wonderful as it was to see the white storks, long horn cattle and fallow deer, I didn't think it was beautiful. OK, it was February, pouring with rain and slick with mud, but the landscape, though wooded, was flat and scrubby in parts. I had to remind myself that it *was* a project and had proved itself in so many ways, with endangered wildlife such as turtle doves, nightingales and purple emperor butterflies returning to the rewilded landscape. Beautiful, scenic landscapes are not the point of the exercise.

In my own back garden, I am allowing wild flowers to seed themselves everywhere, tolerating weeds I would previously have dug up, which I know are good for pollinators (e.g. dandelions) and even leaving the moss which has formed a lovely carpet on our patio! I can't persuade my husband to let the grass grow long, and I must say a green lawn without a weed in sight sets off a garden beautifully, bad though it is for biodiversity. So where do you draw the line? Can our gardens be both nature-friendly *and* beautiful?

Beauty, of course, is in the eye of the beholder, but I bet for many gardeners it is hard to let go of the control of nature that gardening entails, which for many years has been green lawns, perfect flowers and shrubs, all kept in check with a healthy dose of pesticides. We have made progress as people become more aware of the need to maintain habitats for nature in our gardens, but we don't like our gardens to look uncared for and untidy. People seem to be reaching a compromise though, allowing a part of their garden to grow wild, and mowing paths through long grass, to show that they are not just 'letting the garden go'. Perhaps we will come to see untidiness as beautiful, knowing all the wonderful creatures it harbours?

Bee of the month – Early bumblebee

The Early bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*) is one of our prettiest and smallest bumblebees. As the name implies, they emerge early, the queens appearing from hibernation from March onwards, the workers about six weeks after the nest has been established, the nesting period being in May and June. They all have a bright small, pale orange-red tail, and yellow bands on the body. They have a short tongue, and feed on a range of flowers, including blackberries, raspberries and borage - another reason to let some of those brambles grow!

Early bumblebee/Alex Potts

Pollinator plant of the month – Blossom!

Blossom on all kinds of trees really gets going in April and how the bees love it! The blossom seems to be a bit late this year – the blackthorn which is usually one of the first to blossom, is only just coming out as I write, a valuable source of nectar and pollen for bees, and its leaves the food plant for the caterpillars of many moths and butterflies. Ornamental and fruiting apple and cherry trees will be blossoming in our parks and gardens – look out for the red mason bee, a gingery solitary bee which is a very efficient pollinator in orchards.

For more information about Hive Helpers, please visit www.hivehelpers.co.uk , email us on office@hivehelpers.co.uk or phone us on 07895 547637.