

Pollinator Patch with Juliet from Hive Helpers Strawberries and cream?

I always associate June with strawberries and Wimbledon. The granddaddy of tennis tournaments now starts the first week in July rather than the last week in June, but I bet they'll still be serving thousands of punnets of strawberries. This reminded me of a piece I saw recently on one of Rick Stein's *Food Stories* programmes. He was visiting one of James Dyson's farms in south Lincolnshire, where the multi-millionaire businessman (of cordless vacuum fame) has a giant greenhouse covering 15 acres and containing 700,000 strawberry plants. 'You can have strawberries all year round' he says proudly, 'and no food miles'. But why do we need to have strawberries all year round? We already know that to make food production more sustainable, we need to eat seasonally and locally. And why didn't he mention how the strawberries were pollinated?

I had to do a little digging to find out, but on the Dyson Farming Facebook page, I learned that the bumblebees used to pollinate the strawberries (*Bombus terrestris*) were imported from Spain, where they are bred in captivity and shipped as a nest in development. This is not unusual – bumblebees are used commercially all over the world in this way to pollinate glasshouse crops. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust's concern is that these imported bees may carry infectious pathogens, and if they escape, could spread disease to our native pollinators.



Bumblebee nest in the wild

In her *Wild Bee Handbook*, Sarah Wyndham Lewis says that farmers are told to destroy the nests afterwards to reduce the spread of disease. What price strawberries and cream? Buy locally grown, organic strawberries in season straight from the field, pollinated by our own native bees!

Pollinator plant of the month – Sweet rocket

Not to be confused with the salad rocket we grow in the veg garden, sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) is a biennial but helpfully self-seeds freely – it has pretty white or purple flowers, with a fragrant scent like a violet's (hence another of its common names, dame's violet) which is most pronounced in the evening in early summer. As such, it attracts night-flying moths, as well as bees and butterflies. It is also the food plant of many caterpillars.

Other June plants for pollinators

I have mentioned the 'June gap' before, a shortage of nectar and pollen in the wild, just as colonies of bees are growing rapidly. We can help by providing pollinator-friendly plants in our gardens which flower in June. The native common honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) with its fragrant tubular flowers attracts rare butterflies such as the white admiral, and pollinating moths, such as the stunning elephant hawkmoth, are attracted to its scent at night. Many herbs are flowering now, including thyme and wild marjoram/oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), and self-seeded foxgloves are attractive to long-tongued bees such as the common carder bee. Among the shrubs, Pyracantha species provide valuable nectar in the June gap (as well as berries for the birds later in the year) and I am finally going to plant a beauty berry (*Callicarpa*) which I hope will be flowering soon as the bees love it!