

Trees useful to bees

This document lists a number of trees useful for providing pollen and/or nectar for bees and other pollinating insects. The list includes a wide range of plants suitable for a range of habitats, including small and large garden and the wild. Brief details are given of the less common species.

Possible sizes are not given as these can vary dramatically according to the situation, soil, altitude, exposure to wind, etc... Check with a good book before studying trees for small gardens. There are many new cultivars which may vary from the usual species.

All of these trees will normally flower in the UK, although some will need a good summer to flower well. In most cases pollen production is relatively reliable, but nectar production is not, being more affected by the location, soil and weather. Lime and hawthorn are especially fickle in the production of nectar, ranging from profuse to nothing! There is an increasing number of species now being grown in the UK which originate from hotter countries and these may be highly variable in flowering and nectar production. Some of the trees listed are not reliably hardy in colder parts of the country but with warmer summers and milder winters they are able to be grown far more widely, and may produce more nectar in good weather, being good sources of honey in their native countries.



Key to lists:

** tender. * not reliably hardy. Spp = species.

(N) = nectar produced when weather good enough.

N = nectar collected. P = pollen collected.

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****Acacia** Beautiful, tender, winter flowering trees. Winter (N)P

Masses of yellow, scented flowers.
A. dealbata, A. longifolia

Alder Good very early source of pollen. Jan–Mar P
Alnus glutinosa

Blackthorn Common wild hedge plant. Mar–May (N)P
Masses of white flowers.
Valuable source of early pollen.
Prunus spinosa

Cherries Huge group, mainly decorative trees.
Avoid double flowered varieties.
Prunus avium Gean, wild cherry Apr NP
P. cerasus Sour cherry, small shrubby tree. May NP
Profuse flowers.
P. cerasifera Myrobalm, Cherry plum. Mar–Apr (N)P
Wide range of cultivars, some with purple foliage.
P. padus Bird cherry. Long racemes of May NP
white flowers.
P. subhirtella autumnalis Attractive small tree. Winter P
P. x yeodoensis Yoshino cherry. Small, beautiful.
Mar–Apr NP

Chestnuts, Horse chestnuts Large, attractive trees. NP
Aesculus hippocastanum White flowers. Apr–May
A. carnea Red flowers, slightly later. May
A. indica Indian horse chestnut. Pink flowers. May–Jun
A. californica Buckeye. White/pink flowers. Jul–Aug

Chestnut, Sweet or Spanish
Castanea sativa Jul (N)P

Crab Apples Beautiful medium sized trees. Spring NP
Malus spp & hybrids. Many named varieties: John
Downie, Profusion, Golden Hornet.

Eucalyptus spp. Evergreen, aromatic foliage.
Some hardy in the UK. Late summer (N)
E. gunnii, E. niphophila, E. parviflora.

False Acacia
Robinia pseudoacacia Fragrant white flowers. Jun NP
R. viscosa Clammy locust. Late Jun NP
R. hispida Rose acacia. May–Jun NP

Hawthorns Common, wild, small, shrubby trees May NP
Erratic, but can be profuse producers of nectar.
Crataegus oxycantha, C. monogyna
C. prunifolia, C. crus-galli, and many other species.

Hazels Early catkins a valuable source of pollen.
Mar–Apr P
Corylus avellana, C. maxima

Hollies Evergreen, tiny flowers, attractive to bees.
May–Jun NP
Ilex aquifolium, I. opaca and spp.

Honey Locust Long branched spines on trunk, scented
flowers. (N)
Gleditsia tricanthos

Indian Bean Tree Magnificent, spreading trees with
panicles of scented, foxglove-like, speckled flowers.
Jul–Aug NP
Catalpa bignonioides, C. fargesii, C. ovata

Judas Tree Pretty small tree, purple pea-flowers on bare
stems. Apr–May NP
Cercis siliquastrum

June Berry, Snowy mespilus. Beautiful tree, masses of
white flowers in spring, edible fruits in June. Spring
(N)P
Amelanchier lamarckii

Lime Can supply large quantities of nectar when
conditions are right but can be erratic.
Aphids on some species produce honey-dew. (N)
Tilia cordata Small leaved lime. Late Jul
§T. x euclora Crimea lime. No honeydew. Jul–Aug
T. x europaea Common lime. Jun–Jul
T. maximowicziana Japanese lime. Jun
§T. x orbicularis Hybrid lime. Jul–Aug
T. petiolaris Weeping silver lime. Jul–Aug
T. platyphyllos Broad leaved lime. Jun–Jul
T. tomentosa Silver lime. Jul
§ Nectar in these species can stupefy bees.

Maples The decorative Japanese maples rarely flower
in the UK, but the larger species are all excellent bee
plants. Spring (N)P
Acer campestre Field maple, native tree.
A. macrophyllum Oregon maple.
A. negundo Box elder.
A. opalus Italian maple.
A. platanoides Norway maple.

Mountain Ash
Sorbus aucuparia Spring NP
Many other cultivated species.

Sweet Gum
Liquidambar styraciflua and hybrids. Spring (N)

Sycamore Valuable nectar source. May NP
Acer pseudoplatanus

Tree of Heaven Large town tree. Jul–Aug N
Ailanthus altissima

Tulip Tree Large tulip-like flowers. Jun–Jul (N)
Liriodendron tulipifera

Whitebeam
Sorbus aria Common whitebeam. May–Jun NP
S. intermedia Swedish whitebeam. Jun NP



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Less Common Trees

These are less widely grown but are not difficult and are good bee trees. Some flower when there is little other nectar available.

Eucryphia glutinosa, E. nyamansensis Aug–Sep NP
Evergreen. Large, beautiful, single white flowers.

Snowdrop tree Halesia carolina May NP
Pretty, small tree. Bunches of flowers along branches.

Golden Rain tree Koelreuteria paniculata Jul–Aug (N)
Large, loose panicles yellow flowers.

Hop tree Ptelea trifoliata Jun–Jul N
Related to Tetrodium. Aromatic leaves, small white flowers, highly scented. Profuse nectar source.

Pagoda tree Sophora japonica Sep NP
Creamy flowers
S. tetraptera Smaller, needs shelter. Spring NP
Deep yellow bunches of flowers.

Chinese bee tree Aug–Oct NP
Tetrodium (Euodia) danielli, (hupehensis)
Small tree with strongly scented small white flowers. Profuse nectar source.

To find out more about specific plants and their cultural requirements most garden centres and libraries have a reference section with encyclopaedias of garden plants.

Fruit Trees

All are good sources of pollen and many are also excellent nectar producers.

Almond Prunus dulcis
Earliest to flower. Profuse nectar producer.

Apple Malus pumila
Can be grown as cordons and 'bush' forms suitable for small gardens. Range of varieties, flowering from early April to late May. Good nectar producers.

Cherries Prunus cerasus
Large trees, good nectar producers.

Medlar Mespilus germanica May
Large white flowers.

Peach & nectarine Prunus persica
Early flowering, good nectar producer.

Pear Prunus communis Mar–Apr
Weak nectar, rarely collected.

Plum Prunus domestica Early Apr
Good nectar source.

Quince Cydonia oblonga Spring
Good nectar source

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