

Episode 120 show notes and advice

Episode description

To mark World Bee Day on 20th May, Sarah catches up with old friend and collaborator Arthur Parkinson, to discuss the finest, nectar-rich flowers to bring a lively buzz to the garden throughout every season.

In this episode, discover:

- The top 12 plants for passing pollinators
- Easy ways to attract and retain pollinators in the garden
- Arthur shares the inspiration behind his brand-new book

episode 120 advice sheet

Honourable mentions (2:05)

Sarah explains that it's important to choose plants that will supply early pollinators, such as bumblebees, with nectar-rich forage.

Sarah loves to grow elegant willows, such as 'Nancy Saunders' and a pink-flowering variety that blooms really early in the season, way ahead of the others. Sarah is always impressed with how popular willows are with pollinators, providing essential nutrients.

Honeysuckle is another great option for attracting pollinators, and is always very popular with bees, Arthur adds.

Similarly, a lot of shrubs are also effective, and require little maintenance.

Spring

Iris reticulata (4:16)

Iris reticulata 'Purple Hill' is a much-loved variety, with the most beautiful Parma Violet scent, and dusty blue Iris reticulata 'Alida' – which are both adored by the bumble bees. Opening slightly late, just after Valentine's Day, Sarah explains that the flowers have only just gone over. Arthur adds that they are perennial too and produce beautiful flowers year

after year. Sarah says they look wonderful growing beneath the naturalised narcissus at Perch Hill.

Corsican hellebores (5:20)

Great for early spring, Arthur is a big fan of Corsican hellebores, in vibrant and zappy lime green. He explains that these are often overlooked in comparison to the pastel alternatives. With little waxy leaves, Arthur says that these hellebores come into flower in their second year and are capable of withstanding tough conditions. They look great in any sunny or part-shaded garden, are long-flowering, and look wonderful in an arrangement or alone in a vase for up to a month!

Although, because these plants are so good for pollinators, it's best to leave them in the garden for the bees to enjoy.

Narcissus pseudonarcissus (7:05)

Sarah explains that they've just completed a big planting of *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* at Perch Hill, the traditional Lent daffodil.

Sarah recalls visiting rural Herefordshire and Gloucestershire with photographer Jonathan Buckley, looking for narcissus in the wild, a few years ago. She says it was a truly magical experience, made complete by the subtle hum of bees hopping from flower to flower. Taking inspiration from this memory, Sarah planted loads of daffodil bulbs down the drive at Perch Hill, which look tremendous on scale. Sarah hopes these will fully naturalise, to look as if they have been there for centuries. These UK native narcissus also appear to be more popular with the pollinators in comparison to Mediterranean varieties.

Early summer

Shrub roses (8:55)

Some roses are excellent for pollinators, such as Rosa 'Tottering-by-Gently' in a glorious and subtle yellow, and Arthur's personal favourite, Rosa 'Morning Mist' which is vigorous and great for cutting in bright coral-orange.

Sarah recalls a previous RHS Chelsea Flower Show where she used a lot of climbing rose, 'Warm Welcome' – which, in a fiery orange, looked simply stunning en masse. These plants

are still carrying on almost 20 years later in the Oast Garden at Perch Hill and are incredibly floriferous. Another favourite semi-double is 'Night Owl.'

Alliums (10:32)

Allium sicutum (syn. Nectaroscordum sicutum) looks like flowery candelabras and is adored by bees. Almost like watching a ballet, the honey bees and bumble bees travel from flowerhead to flowerhead performing the most wonderful dance.

Midsummer

Verbena Verbena bonariensis (11:30)

Arthur recalls the heatwave last summer and seeing the hummingbird hawk-moth visit the verbena for its pollen-rich flowers. This verbena is adored for its drought-resistant nature and hardiness in the summer heat.

Sarah also explains that birds love verbenas for their seedheads and are great for attracting natural aviaries of gold finches. Sarah has also seen green finches feast on the seedheads too - the perfect pairing of garden plants and wildlife.

Lavender (13:25)

Another of Sarah's favourite plants for pollinators, although traditionally lavenders don't thrive in heavy clay soil. This year at Perch Hill, they will be completing lavender trials in pots, something Sarah is really excited about.

Elegant varieties with cut leaves such as *Lavandula dentata*, are much more refined. Along with French lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) with its rabbit ears or wands of velvet, which are much showier. They flower longer and are even better for the bees and butterflies. Sarah has seen peacock, tortoise shell, and red admiral butterflies visit often.

The best time to prune lavenders is after flowering and then again in April time.

Late summer

Cardoon (16:35)

Arthur's favourite statuesque perennial, with huge, goblet-like flowers, cardoon is always busy with bees. In particular, the bumblebees seem to adore this plant with its indigo

nectaries. Arthur explains that this will be his first year growing cardoon from seed, something he's really excited about. Plus, it's more cost-effective too.

Hardier than artichokes, these are a great alternative to help achieve the same look.

Single flowering dahlias (18:51)

Some of Sarah's favourite flowers for a late summer and autumn garden include Dahlias 'Sarah Raven' and 'Lou Farman,' which are also favoured by the bees and butterflies. Similarly, the anemone group, is also very popular due to the flower's nectar-rich properties. Sarah explains they are currently trialling a few more pollinator-friendly varieties to keep an eye out for.

Dahlias 'Totally tangerine', 'Abigail' and 'Blue Bayou' are also excellent for the bees and butterflies and are covered in red admirals even in October. Sarah says she can see up to eight butterflies at any one time.

Late autumn

Aster novae-angliae 'Violetta' (20:14)

Inspired by the exotic garden at Chatsworth, Asters (the old-fashioned varieties) in vivid colours, are a standout option for Arthur. Tall and great choice for making your cutting garden more perennial. Vibrant purple with rich yellow centres, the bumblebees completely adore them. Also, these are a great alternative to dahlias.

Later in the year

Salvias (21:00)

Reliable, hardy, and great for all types of gardens, Sarah, along with the bees and butterflies, adores varieties like 'Amistad.' Easy and incredibly low-maintenance, these are great options for all types of gardens.

Arthur literary projects (22:32)

'Chicken Boy: My Life with Hens', Arthur's brand-new book is out now and available at all good bookstores.

Arthur is also writing another book 'Flower Yard 2' which follows on from his debut novel 'The Flower Yard,' which came out in 2021. Complete with Arthur's signature illustrations, and with a strong emphasis on pollinators, this book will be on the shelves in October.