

# Managing your orchard... for bumblebees

Factsheet 4  
Land management  
series



Bumblebees and other wild bees are very important for orchards as they pollinate the trees whilst collecting pollen and nectar. By changing how you manage habitats in and around your orchard you can support more bumblebees, boosting pollination and fruit yields.

## Key facts:

**Funding available:** England

**Sustainability:** Long-term option

**Upkeep:** Annual mowing &/or grazing

**Habitat quality:** High-very high

## Why manage an orchard for bumblebees?

This factsheet is aimed primarily at people who can manage their orchard traditionally, although many practices can also be used in larger, commercial orchards; whatever the size, there is plenty that you can do for bumblebees.

Since the 1950s, over 60% of all England's orchards have vanished as a result of development pressures, conversion to other uses and neglect due to economic difficulties of small-scale fruit growing. Sensitively managed orchards can provide a haven for bumblebees, particularly if they support a flower-rich grassland beneath the trees.

The blossom from apple, pear, cherry, plum and other fruit trees provides early forage for bumblebees. This is a particularly important for queen bumblebees coming out of hibernation in the spring. After this, bumblebees use flowers in the grassland beneath the trees, and in the hedges and edges around the orchard. These flowers support bumblebees throughout their lifecycle to ensure they produce the new queens in late summer that are needed to establish nests the following year.

## Why conserve bumblebees?

Almost all of the UK's 24 species of bumblebee are thought to have declined in range or abundance.

Bumblebees are hard-working and versatile pollinators and hence provide an important service to agriculture. They are also key in maintaining our biodiversity, as so many wild plants depend upon them for pollination.

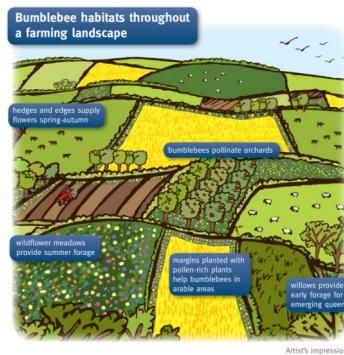


Bumblebees provide a vital 'pollination service' in orchards, with almost all fruit resulting from pollination by a bee or other insect.

## What is a traditional orchard?

Traditional orchards are a valuable feature of our rural landscape and heritage. They typically have widely-spaced trees of old, and often scarce, varieties and are defined as five or more fruit trees spaced no further apart than 20m from crown edge to crown edge over permanent grassland.

## How orchard management for bumblebees can work on your farm...



- supports pollination
- increases fruit and other crop yields
- supported by agri-environment schemes
- benefits diversification
- provides nutrient-rich grazing and hay
- reduces outlay



For more information on bumblebees and land management please visit

[www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org)

## How can orchard management help bumblebees?

Bumblebees need pollen- and nectar-rich flowers to visit throughout their nesting season (March to mid-September). Orchard trees provide important forage for bumblebees in the early months but once the blossom has gone, it is the grassland underneath the trees, and the hedges, ditches and banks alongside them, that are vital to sustain populations.

### Grassland management

To encourage a wide diversity of wildflowers and hence provide the best habitat for bumblebees, management should ideally mimic that of a traditional hay meadow. The grassland beneath the trees should be allowed to flower from May to late July/August and then harvested as hay. Grazing in autumn and spring will also help maintain and enhance a flower-rich sward, as will ensuring no chemical fertilisers are applied (in accordance with traditional orchard management practices). For more information please refer to factsheet 4 in our Land management series: 'Managing wildflower meadows for bumblebees'.

In some cases orchards can be challenging to cut for hay if, for example, the trees are too close together for agricultural machinery to gain access. In these situations grazing (see below) or use of smaller machinery can work well - your local BBCT Conservation Officer can provide advice on this.

Grazing is widely used as the sole means of management of the grassland in traditional orchards. Rather than taking a hay cut, stock can be used to graze-off the standing crop at the end of the summer - so long as stock are excluded over the vital summer months to ensure the flowers are there when the bumblebees need them!

### Grassland enhancement

Implementing good management on grassland areas can sometimes be enough to increase the diversity of flowers that your orchard supports. However, if there is no source of seed nearby you may need to introduce key species such as clovers, vetches, yellow rattle and knapweed. For detailed information please see factsheet 5 in our Land management series: 'Grassland restoration and creation for bumblebees'.



Sheep grazing under the shade of mature orchard trees.

### Funding

In England, the Environmental Stewardship scheme has options to support orchards of high landscape, historical or wildlife value:

#### Higher Level Stewardship options:

HC18 Maintenance of high-value traditional orchards	£250/ha
HC20 Restoration of traditional orchards	£250/ha
HC19 Maintenance of traditional orchards in production	£ 95/ha
HC21 Creation of traditional orchards	£190/ha

There may also be funding available under agri-environment schemes or projects in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - please contact your local Bumblebee Conservation Officer for information.

We may also be able to provide free wildflower seed for use around your orchard.

### Hedge and edge management

Hedgerows and other edge habitats can provide vital pockets of forage for bumblebees, particularly as they come to the end of their nesting season. It is important not to cut hedges and or trample hedge-bases until the end of September, as they not only provide vital flowers but are often popular nesting sites for bumblebees.



Rotational cutting of ditches, banks and grassland strips in sections in late summer provides valuable uncut flowery areas throughout the bumblebee season. Another simple way to help bumblebees and boost pollination is to sow a clover-rich strip around the edge of your orchard. For more information please see factsheets 5 and 6 in our Land management series: 'Managing hedges and edges for bumblebees' and 'Managing field margins for bumblebees'.

### Other beasties love orchards too!

Orchards provide habitat for many solitary bees, which are also fantastic pollinators. Providing small patches of bare ground, installing bee nest boxes and keeping deadwood within the orchard creates nest sites for these bees. Deadwood is also used by the rare noble chafer beetle!

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust works throughout the UK to promote bumblebee-friendly land management and raise public and political awareness of bumblebees.

To join please visit our website...

[www.bumblebeeconservation.org](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org)



## Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Get in touch... Phone: 01786 467818  
Email: [enquiries@bumblebeeconservation.org](mailto:enquiries@bumblebeeconservation.org)

If your land is in an agri-environment scheme please discuss any changes in management with your agreement adviser

