

FEBRUARY 2011

# SUCKLEY NEWSLETTER



From the depths of midwinter, the third issue of the Suckley Newsletter is here to remind you that spring is on it's way and the days are getting (slightly) longer and the temperatures, well, they will get warmer – eventually.

Whether it's the first sight of a sleepy bumble bee bumping into your Christmas roses or the sight of the first snowdrops breaking through, the clues are all there and to back this up, this issue is packed with other great stuff to help you wake up from winter. From keep fit classes, winding the church clock, bee news, inspirational encounters, gardening to delicious sounding pudding adventures, all sorts of fun and interesting events are going on in and around the village - including 10% off a Valentine's dinner at The Talbot.

These are all stories from you, about what's going on in your village, but we know there's much, much more so please let us know what your clubs are up to, what you did at school, how it used to be here in the village, or anything else you would like to share with your friends and neighbours – tips, recipes, memories, nature watch, notices and events – we would love to hear from you.

So make a cup of tea, sit back and relax and read all about what's going on in your village. Then get inspired, get out there and get involved! The only thing that's certain is that you'll get back more than you put in...



FREE Newsletter to Suckley Residents

FEBRUARY 2011

## Points of contact:

Newsletter Content: Hilary Pitt – 884355

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Next Issue: First week in April.

Content for newsletter to be submitted **23rd March 2011**.

Suckley Post Office: Roger & Barbara Blackburn - 884201.

Shop Open: Mon – Fri 7.00am – 6.00pm, Sat 7.00am – 1.00pm

Post Office Open: Mon – Fri 9.00am – 5.30pm (till 1.00pm Weds)

Sat 9.00am – 12.30pm

Village websites – for up to date information on what is happening in the village as well as a list of businesses and trades: [www.suckleypo.co.uk](http://www.suckleypo.co.uk) & [www.suckley.net](http://www.suckley.net)

Village Hall: Steve Boughton - 884210

Suckley School: Mr Matthew Meckin - 884283

Suckley Pre-School: Linda Negrin-Torres - 884766

Church: Wardens: Dr Anne M Lewis – 884552

Parish Clerk: Mrs Diana Taylor - 01684 569430

Playing Fields: Bookings & Pitches Mr & Mrs Luton – 884558

Skateboard Arena: Mr P Beaumont – 884550

West Mercia Constabulary: Emergency 999. Other matters 0300 333 3000

PC3381 Sarah Ransome-Williams, CSO 6494 Tracey Caldwell,

CSO 5481 Collin Davies.

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Follow us on Facebook 'The Talbot at Knightwick' & Twitter 'The\_Talbot'  
to keep up with news and events on a day to day basis

FEBRUARY 2011

## The Village Store

Suckley's Village Store and Post Office is the only remaining shop within the village, at one time the community supported at least three more. The current owners, Roger and Barbara Blackburn took over 7 years ago and have invested time and effort developing the shop into a facility that many less fortunate rural communities would be delighted to have in their villages.

Roger and Barbara spent two years in Western Australia before returning to the UK and finding their rural idyll in Suckley,

"We went to Australia with the intention of settling there permanently but we found that there were lots of things about England that we missed terribly - the seasons and the variety of the countryside to name just two. We had lived in the English countryside for most of our lives, in Lancashire, Herefordshire, Hampshire and East Sussex and unfortunately constant sunshine and blue skies were not sufficient compensation for being surrounded by an enormous desert."

After two years of uncertainty the Post Office survived the closure programme in 2008/2009 and is able to offer all the services you would expect including pre-order foreign currency and Euros always in stock, unfortunately it is not able to offer Motor Vehicle Licensing. Royal Mail Group is about to undergo significant changes with some sort of privatisation on the agenda for this year and it is unclear as yet how this will affect rural Sub-Post Offices which rely heavily on mail-work for their survival.

The shop is always well stocked and offers a wide range of goods including fresh bread, milk, groceries, frozen food, cigarettes, newspapers, snacks and confectionery. Barbara's filled rolls, freshly made each day, have a reputation which has spread far and wide. A dry cleaning and laundry service is offered through Priory Cleaners who collect and deliver twice weekly. The sale of donated second hand books raises money for local causes. Winter lines also include bags of coal, logs and kindling.

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A web site [www.suckleypo.co.uk](http://www.suckleypo.co.uk) established 5 years ago as an internet presence for the Shop and Post Office, has developed into a well-used community site attracting around 800 - 1000 visitors each month. As well as promoting local events and details of Parish Council meetings it contains a collection of photographs of local scenery. The site also hosts a local business directory giving instant access to almost 100 local tradesmen and services. A listing on the directory is available from £20 per year.

*"We realise that nowadays no-one is going to do their weekly shop at the village shop but we hope that we fulfil our role as a top-up shop well. During the bad weather this winter and last year we have seen our busiest weeks since we took over. Difficulties travelling out of the area are definitely good for business and our trusty Land Rover Discovery enabled us to collect supplies when the normal deliveries didn't arrive. However, it would be nice to see some of these customers on a more regular basis, without a stable customer base there is always the danger that the shop will not be there when you need it most!"*



### Buzz Words....flowers that feed honey bees

*In the last edition of the newsletter local beekeeper Robin Hill answered some frequently-asked questions about bees and honey. This time he gives a beekeeper's view of the best food sources in gardens and the countryside.*

**In a recent radio programme it was said that bees in London gardens often make the most honey, yet I thought that they would always be more successful in the countryside. Can you explain?**

This is quite often the case. Several reasons have been suggested, including that the fact that urban areas can be several degrees warmer than rural ones. However, I think that the main reason lies in the rich

## FEBRUARY 2011

variety of nectar-yielding plants that are grown in the many gardens and parks of the city. This mix means that bees do not go hungry whilst waiting for a major agricultural crop like oil seed rape to flower, and instead have a sequence of flowers to visit.

### What is the honey bees' favourite source of nectar?

The clear favourite is clover. Recent estimates are that this accounts for about 75% of the total national honey crop, which is a surprise to many people! The clover can be cultivated or wild, although the white variety, found flowering on roadside verges from June onwards, is a particular favourite.

### So if I mow the grass in my orchard less often, could I be supplying a good source of food for bees?

Yes. At different times of year your orchard could provide some good food sources – in the early weeks of the year the yellow flowers of winter aconite give bees both pollen and nectar, spring dandelions are a seasonal favourite too, and in autumn the greenish-yellow flowers of the ivy provide bees with their last major food source. And don't forget the fruit trees themselves – the different varieties of apple can extend the flowering season to 3-4 weeks, whilst cherries also provide early summer pollen and nectar.

### If the low-growing clover is the most popular nectar source then which one comes second?

This is a much taller one – the common Lime. It accounts for the majority of the remaining crop, especially in towns and cities where it is a popular parkland tree. It can be very large, often growing to 100ft tall, and usually flowers for 2-3 weeks from mid-June. It is a valuable stop-gap for bees when there are fewer other flowers for them to work.

### What are your three favourite bee-friendly plants in your garden?

The shrub cotoneaster, which usually flowers in May and June, never fails to attract large numbers of excited bees. Of the herbs I'd choose borage, both for its appealing sky-blue flowers and for its taste in salads and summer drinks. And I'd also include the common blackberry, from both hedge and garden, which has a long flowering season and supplies the ingredients for tasty pies too!

### Do bumble bees and honey bees often compete with each other for food?

No, not usually. Bumbles, being considerably bigger, can reach to the base of large, productive flowers which are inaccessible to other insects. These include the azalea and rhododendron. Buddleias can also deter honey bees. However, bumbles sometimes puncture the base of the flowers like daffodils and comfrey when visiting them, and this lets our honey bees in to collect whatever nectar is left.

### I have seen honey bees seemingly motionless around the edge of my garden pond on sunny spring days. What would they be doing?

Almost certainly collecting water. Apart from those times when there is a major flow of nectar, with a high natural water content, some bees will be on water-gathering duties. Water is needed to add to stored honey to make it edible, as well as for cooling the brood in the hive in very hot weather. If you don't have a garden pond why don't you help thirsty bees by filling a shallow pan or tray with water and placing some stones in it for the bees to land on.

### I love the flavour of heather honey. Is it worth planting more heathers in my garden to help bees?

Heather honey is usually dark in colour and strong in flavour. Some beekeepers will take their hives to the heather moors in August to allow the bees to work the flowers for a month or so before bringing them back home and pressing the resulting honey from the comb. Although you'll need a rather large expanse of heather to get unadulterated heather honey I'm sure that your local bees will thank you for supplying a welcome end of season treat.

### Even though I do try to be 'green' in my garden I sometimes need to use pesticides to control unwelcome visitors. Is this a problem for bees?

If you are buying new products always look for those that say they are bee friendly and so pose less risk. Try to avoid spraying when there are flowers that will attract insects, and if possible apply in the evening, when bees have finished flying for the day.



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## Reaching for the Stars

*Suckley resident John Lowe's grandson Jack was awarded a prestigious Kings Scholarship at King's School in Worcester, a scholarship awarded to leading scholars since the reign of Henry the Eighth in the 15th century. In recognition of this achievement, John gave his grandson a telescope. This is the story of how that gift is taking Jack on an amazing journey that could one day take him far....*

Jack (14) is an aspiring Astronomer, and is taking his GCSE in Astronomy this year. John thought it would be an inspirational day out for him if he could arrange to visit Professor Stephen Hawking and the Astronomy Department at Cambridge University. Professor Craig McKay who is a leading Astronomer and personal friend was able to make the necessary arrangements for them to attend on December 10th. This is Jack's school report of his day at Cambridge University:-

On a frosty morning, after an early rise at 6 o'clock, my grandfather and I set off in his car to Cambridge University Astronomy Department – I'd been invited to spend the day with them! The journey from Worcester was uneventful, but with all the snow we'd had in the week before I had been worried we would not get there at all, let alone by 9 o'clock. However, we arrived in good time and as we waited in the lobby we saw some amazing astronomical photographs and overheard some pretty intense discussions from behind closed doors.

Our host, Professor Craig McKay, greeted us and on the way to his office talked me through some of the photographs on the walls: He explained how spiral galaxies aren't really spirals and explained the Hubble Deep Field where all the faint photons from distant galaxies had been collected so we could see hundreds and thousands of galaxies really far away.

Lord Rees, President of the Royal Society and Astronomer Royal passed us as we were looking at the photographs and Professor McKay told us that

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## FEBRUARY 2011



*Jack next to the Bronze bust made by the sculptor Ian Walters for Professor Hawking. The bust stands proudly outside the Professor's office next to lots of photos which includes the Simpsons and Einstein.*

if we were lucky we might see other famous faces – only last week Neil Armstrong the Astronaut had visited the department.

Professor McKay took me to see the main telescopes around the campus and he showed me the once biggest telescope in the world – well it was in 1865, but students still use it for observing. The UK's biggest telescopes aren't used so much anymore, due to light pollution, so he told me he is going off to the high desert in Chile next year where the air is thinner and cleaner and the telescopes are enormous (I offered to carry his bags for him – he said he'd let me know...).

We enjoyed a brief detour into the middle of Cambridge where Professor McKay took us for lunch at Corpus Christi College and the dining room reminded me of Hogwarts in the Harry Potter stories with old high wood ceilings and old wooden long tables.

After coffee, Professor McKay drove us to Cambridge Mathematical Institute and on the way we discussed the Pioneer Effect and Dark Matter. The Institute was an absolutely amazing building: all glass, steel and curvy architecture - a truly inspiring place to study. At reception we were met by a lady called Judith Croasdell, who is Professor Stephen Hawking's Personal Assistant. She introduced me to Sam Blackburn, another of Professor Hawking's assistant. He looks after Professor Hawking's technical requirements such as his voice box and his wheelchairs.

## FEBRUARY 2011

I couldn't help noticing that there were blackboards everywhere – Sam said they were there so if someone had a sudden brainwave they could just make a note for others to see and add to!

Judith showed me the pile of correspondence of people asking to meet him and wanting him to endorse certain products or books. It made me realise just how lucky I was to be there, in his office!

Judith then spotted the Professor's car returning. I was so nervous about meeting him but I managed to say hello, apart from the fact that I called Professor Hawking 'Mr Hawking' I think I hid my nerves well. It was an honour to meet such a great physicist – he's second only to Einstein.

It was a truly great day – one I'll never forget. I really enjoyed meeting inspiring people and it has made me determined to work harder in the hope that one day I might be a part of such exciting scientific study.

### **The Bruff - the video.**

Councillor Mike Jackson (long time professional video maker) is planning to make a short documentary film about the history of The Bruff.

If you used to work there and have memories of it, Mike would like to film an interview with you - either at your home or at the Bruff site. Do you know of others with good strong memories of the Bruff? This is the time to encourage them to come forward to participate.

If anyone has photos or artefacts (letters, bills, wages slips), Mike would like to film these. The plan is to make a 30 minute film (illustrated with action footage of the Hancock's Bruff machine at Bishops Cleeve) that would be available for sale as a DVD at the Post Office. Free copy for contributors.

All proceeds to the Village Hall funds. Please get in touch with Mike via the Post Office.

For examples of Mike's video work, visit: [www.splash-tv.co.uk](http://www.splash-tv.co.uk)

## FEBRUARY 2011

### Suckley Village Hall

Suckley Village Hall upcoming events for your diary. Start time is 7.30pm unless otherwise noted. Tickets are normally available from Suckley Post Office or on the night if places remain available.

◆	<p><b>WHITE HOUSE TALK – 26<sup>th</sup> February 7.30pm</b>  <b>The Restoration and Repair of the White House - the latest chapter!</b></p> <p>The White House is one of Suckley's most important historical buildings and of course a distinctive landmark. The present owner, Lionel Persey QC gives a short history of the house and a fascinating and illustrated insight into the planning, philosophy and execution of the restoration of this Grade 1 listed home.</p> <p>Tickets priced £8 are available from Suckley Post Office, 01886 884201. <i>Ticket price includes a donation to support the work of Help for Heroes and the Hill Trust. NOTE: Advanced ticket purchase is strongly recommended as previous chapters in the story have sold out very quickly!</i></p>
◆	<p><b>Saturday March 12th, 7.30pm: Quiz Night is back!!</b></p> <p>It's time for another of our Quiz Nights with the brilliant Gwyn Williams - if you haven't been to one of Gwyn's quiz nights at the hall before, do come along and enjoy what's always an entertaining and very social evening with lots of laughs... £4 a head and teams of up to 4 people. If you don't have a team, you can still come along on your own or as a couple as there are always others who do the same and we can normally match you up into a team on the night. There are prizes for both the winning and losing teams.</p> <p>Tickets at Suckley Post Office (01886 884201), or on the door. It's a bring your own drinks and nibbles event, glasses provided.</p>
◆	<p><b>Saturday April 9th, 7.30pm: The intriguing story of an Edwardian Lady Photographer</b></p> <p>... as told by local historian and Worcestershire Museums officer Robin Hill</p>

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## FEBRUARY 2011

◆	<p><b>Saturday May 21st, 7.30pm: Race Night...</b></p> <p>... and they're off! Race night is always one of our most popular events... place your (small) bets, sponsor a race... hear what the pundits have to say about the form and then watch the race on the Village Hall Big Screen(!) accompanied by expert commentary.</p> <p>Tickets include a hot supper!</p>
◆	<p><b>Saturday June 18th: Family Quiz night...</b></p> <p>A fun event for all ages and one that'll need parents and children (or uncles and aunties and nephews/nieces, or grandchildren and grandparents) to work together to be in with a chance of winning!</p>

### Events at the Nelson Pub

Friday 4th March - 7pm Quiz Night & raffle  
 In aid of Suckley School Friends Assoc. \*\*Winning team prizes\*\*  
 £2.50 per person Basket meals available at £5.95  
 Pre book on 01886 832576

### Events at Holloways Greenhouse Café

Friday 11th February Limited Edition Italian Lunch  
 Enjoy a delicious Italian lunch featuring all your favourite classics – free glass of Prosecco with 2 or 3 course meals.

Sunday 3rd April Mothering Sunday Lunch  
 Show your mum how much she means to you on Mothering Sunday by treating her to a traditional Sunday Lunch.

### The (Malvern) Hills are alive....with the sound of music!

.....so rediscover the joy of live music, played by a wonderful string orchestra here in Suckley. Volante Strings is a small orchestra that performs without a conductor. Instead they are directed by Kathy Holmes, professional violinist from Suckley. Our next concert will be in St Edburga's Church, Leigh on May 14 at 7.30pm. There will be more information about Volante Strings in the next issue of the Newsletter but meantime you can contact Kathy Holmes on 01886 884696 or email soundpost1@aol.com for more information.

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**Look out for:** The Health and Wellbeing Directory will be printed shortly and distributed to all homes in the village.

If you would like to be volunteer or be involved in any way please contact: Marie Woodroff, Volunteer Co-ordinator: 01886 884562.

**Look out for:** Border News is a new service (launched in December 2010) providing news about communities on the Worcestershire Herefordshire border, and is centred around an email distribution list - check out <http://www.suckley.net/bordernews.htm> for more details.

### **Wanted! Mature ladies and gentlemen for local keep fit class.**

Fitness, flexibility and fun at Suckley Village Hall, every Tuesday, 11am to 12 noon. For more information, contact Margaret on 01886 884301 or Julian on 07770 822033.

### **Would you like some free exercise whilst helping the village? Do you want to know the time?**

Please phone me if you are able to help by winding the church clock occasionally. It involves climbing quite a few steps, then winding three pulleys, taking about five minutes. The more of us on the rota, the less time we shall have to do it!

I would love to hear from anyone able to help in this way, and I can show you what you would have to do. Contact John Hammonds on 884221 for to volunteer.

## Suckley Church

Regular Services at Suckley: There is a basic pattern of:

1st Sunday All Age Worship 11am (a lively informal service)

2nd Sunday Evensong with prayers for healing 6pm (a quiet contemplative service)

3rd Sunday we go to Alfrick for their All Age service at 11am or Leigh for Evensong at 6pm

4th and 5th Sundays Common Worship Holy Communion with a Sunday School (a traditional service).

For further information please contact Anne Lewis (Suckley 884552)

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FEBRUARY 2011

## Allotment News from Jill Hammonds

We have 15 keen people who have booked a plot for this year, many of whom have paid up early to secure their pitch. I look forward to them forming a gardening community, hopefully sharing ideas, resources and possibly vegetables! Some people are planning raised beds, smart paths etc., others will just pop seeds in and hope for the best. (My style of gardening!)

I intend to provide picnic table(s) to help with the socialising, and making a place for relaxation between work sessions. Toilet facilities will even be available. I am just negotiating 'Apprentice' style with the various firms, to get a good deal on sheds for those who want them. It's amazing what discounts you can get if you ask.

John has ploughed the ground, and now that we have had so many hard frosts the soil will hopefully be in good condition. The muck heap and taps by the water troughs will soon be in place so it's all definitely happening.

If anyone else wants to be included in this exciting new venture please let us know in the next two months. You can have a 60ft x 20ft plot for £2 a week.

Call John or Jill Hammonds 884221 or email [john@pewcroft.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:john@pewcroft.fsnet.co.uk)

### Have YOU something to say?

We welcome all contributions to the newsletter and are very grateful to those who have written for this issue. If you would like to write something (or ask a question) for the newsletter, whether it is about a Suckley past or what the village needs for the future, please get in touch – call Hilary on 884355 or email [suckleynews@gmail.com](mailto:suckleynews@gmail.com)

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## **Puddings Pies and Pastries by the Village Hall Reporter**

I'm told that the earliest rumours that there might be a 'Puddings Night' being organized at Suckley Village Hall resulted in endless ooohs, aaahs, mmms and other noises of general enthusiasm. 6 months in the making, January finally saw the event take place. We were promised live pudding-cooking demonstrations, recipes, stories and history... and, of course, tasting!

Carol Boughton, host and chef for the evening, described herself somewhat modestly as 'just a housewife rather than a TV chef' - and then proceeded to take up the Nigella role with enthusiasm and flair. And when I say took up the Nigella role, Carol actually was on TV - with a great big projection screen showing close ups of the cooking action! Now don't get me wrong here... I'm no beans-on-toast making loser in the kitchen myself... but the idea of making and cooking a perfect jam sponge pudding live, on-stage and in front of an audience, from breaking eggs to serving with a flourish in 7 minutes flat is quite an impressive feat.

Then an 'impossible pudding' whisked up equally quickly; next a filo pastry topped plum recipe made whilst entertaining us with facts and pudding history... the puddings just kept on coming. Husband Steve played an admirable sous-chef role, running to and from the oven! And we learnt that Pudding cloths were first used in the 17th century... but turned out to be too complicated for mere amateurs to use when servants and the upstairs/downstairs culture faded away.

At the moment the start of the Eating part was announced I was surprised at the restraint shown by the audience. I'd expected scenes of chaos and a stampeding audience, similar (I'd imagine) to what might happen as visitors entered the tasting room as part of a Ben and Jerry's factory tour. But, no, everyone made their way in a very dignified, but still hungry, way to the tables. Thankfully there wasn't too much conspicuous drooling.

cont ....

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**FEBRUARY 2011**

One of two tables groaning with the puddings made by Carol (apologies for the photo quality - it was taken on a mobile - but we just had to show you what was on offer!)



There were 16 puddings on offer at the tasting. I'm ashamed to admit that I only sampled 8 before retiring full. But, then again, nobody else on our table managed more than 11. As part of the fun, the audience voted on their favourite pudding of the night. The winner, Malvern Pudding (a light spongy pudding with both apple and citrus flavours) was, Carol explained with some mild annoyance, the one pudding that she'd neither made nor tasted before... having found the recipe on the internet just a few days before.

My guess is that the next Pudding Night - if Carol does offer to host another - may be more than a little over-subscribed!

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## Plants for Bees - and other insects

Adrian Holmes has kindly offered to write a gardening column for the Suckley newsletter. He would welcome your input and any feedback on his articles. But first, an introduction....

*I have had a long interest in gardening, but no clue whatsoever as to where it came from - no recollection of spending happy hours in the sun drenched garden of my parent's home. Just the opposite in fact, as my recollections are of being pointed to the lawn mower and told to get on with it! On completing what may have been my third or fourth "career", I undertook a two year part time course in Professional Horticulture at Pershore College. This course certainly fed a much wider interest in plants and their uses in the garden and I have continued studies with RHS courses and at Pershore. An interest in travel combined with my interests in plants has enabled me, under the auspices of Pershore College, two botanising trips to China taking in the mountains of the eastern Himalayas in Yunnan and Sichuan, with hopes of a further trip this year to north Yunnan and Tibet.*

Previously in this issue, Robin's article touches on food sources for honey bees. This article expands on that and covers sources of nectar and pollen for wildlife more generally. This article does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of insect friendly plants, it simply highlights some of the best ones which are easy to grow and should flourish in our local environment.

### Early Spring

Robin has highlighted the winter aconite. This plant likes a moist, humus rich soil which does not dry out in summer. It needs about 10°C for the flowers to open. Plants are usually bought "in the green" (i.e. after flowering but still with some leaves) because the dried corms sold in the autumn rarely establish themselves. If you want to grow them from seed, collect it fresh in late spring and sow immediately. Beware though, slugs love aconites.

cont...

Alongside the aconites we have snowdrops. Again, the dried bulbs only establish after a few years struggle, if at all, so they are usually also purchased in the green. This is not the ideal time however, as the roots will be damaged in the lifting process and the leaves have not yet completed their task of re-energising the bulb for next year's flowers. So if you have a clump you wish to divide, leave it until May or June when the leaves have died down and the roots shrivelled. You can then lift, divide and replant immediately and they won't even know they've been moved.

Pulmonarias or lungworts (charmingly called because the leaves look like diseased lungs) or you may know them as soldiers and sailors because the flowers emerge red then turn to blue, are excellent early flowerers for bees and insects. They are easy to grow round here and self seed prolifically in my garden. If you can grow them, Christmas Roses are another good source of food that can last for weeks. A bit on the pernickety side, they do better in pots but there are cultivars coming onto the market now that are reckoned to be more reliable in the ground. No such grandiose pretensions from its cousin, the Lenten Rose and other hybrids of the hellebores. Feed them well (spring and summer), give them a humus rich moist soil and cut off their leaves in late winter, and they can be with you for up to forty years. They are not shy about propagating themselves either, and will self seed wildly if you let them.

### Spring

As spring progresses, so more plants open up their flowers to the warming sun and longer days. Daffodils, crocuses and hyacinths and other spring bulbs are good for insect life, as are other stalwarts such as our native primroses, cowslips and forget-me-nots.

I have met few gardeners who do not relish the colour and freshness of spring – unaffected as yet by miners, aphids, bugs, weevils or beetles, or rusts, spots or curls and so on. In front of the floral and foliage display is a manicured lawn with neatly clipped edges – and a potential sheltered refuge for small creatures has gone.

cont...

## FEBRUARY 2011

Even if you don't have an orchard where you can let the grass grow, it is worth considering leaving a small patch of grass unmown, and so much better also if you could let some nettles and thistles grow – but they will need controlling. The next step up is to see if you can persuade wild flowers such as ox-eye daisies, cornflowers, poppies, corn marigolds, corn cockles and the like to grow. They not only attract wildlife, but look great as well.

### Mind the gap

You will probably have noticed that there is a "gap" around May/June following the spring bounty and before the summer fest (hopefully) begins. Apart from providing food sources at the beginning and end of the year, it is equally important to keep a continuous supply going during this relatively quiet time. Some shrubs and trees are good, such as hazels, shrubby willows and some species of honeysuckle, while some species of hardy geraniums, with their flat flower faces, are particularly good. Other plants include late flowering tulips, bluebells (preferably only the English type or they'll soon be smothered by the Spanish bulbs), grape hyacinths, arabis, aubretia, candy tuft, valerian, wall flowers and poached egg plants. Astrantias, aquilegias and honesty are brilliant plants for this period as they are very easy to grow and will self seed readily.

### Maintaining a diverse supply

If you want to start looking ahead to the summer, growing plants such as hollyhocks, mallow (both the common and musk types), lesser scabious, cornflower and wild clary will be attractive to honey bees and others.

On some general points, if you are growing plants to attract insects, clump them together rather than dotting them around the garden, groups of plants are more attractive than isolated specimens. Also, grow them in the sunniest spot possible. Several of the plants mentioned will do well in the shade, but honey bees in particular like the sun on their backs (well, who doesn't when there's work to be done?). Lastly, a number of plants come in double or semi-double form. Avoid them. They have generally been bred for the show of flowers and the extra petals come at the expense of pollen and nectar – which is why so many are infertile and bloom for ages.

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