



School Gardens for People and Wildlife

Introduction

When we create gardens we often make a distinction between ornamental gardens, food gardens for humans and wildlife gardens which provide food and habitat for birds, insects and small mammals. School gardens are often annual vegetable gardens with some annual flowers. Unfortunately the school year doesn't fit very well with most annual vegetable crops as schools are closed for a crucial part of the growing and harvesting season. An ideal garden for a school is based on perennial plants, as it needs less maintenance than an annual vegetable garden it doesn't need much attention during the summer and it combines wildlife habitat and for with human food, natural beauty and lots of learning opportunities. It also looks beautiful.

The idea is to recreate the structure of native woodland, using some native wild plants and some fruit and vegetables. Native woodland consists of 7 layers:



1. Canopy trees
2. Under-storey trees
3. Shrub layer
4. Herbaceous layer
5. Root vegetables
6. Ground cover layer
7. Climbers

The plants in **Table 1** below are all particularly good for attracting wildlife.

The plants in **Table 2** are all edible plants that are suitable for school gardens. They have harvest times either before June or after September and require little maintenance during the summer. Plants from both tables can be planted together using the forest structure in the diagram.



Table 1 – Plants to Attract Wildlife to School Gardens

Plant	Wildlife Value	Other Uses	Annual/ Perennial	Forest Layer
Comfrey	Nectar for insects especially bumblebees	Add to compost heap or use as mulch* Make a plant feed – especially good for fruiting plants	Perennial	Herbaceous
Elder	Nectar from flowers for insects. Berries for birds and insects	Insect repellent – from leaves. Fruit Litmus test.	Perennial	Canopy
Calendula/ Marigold	Nectar for insects	Insect deterrent in garden. Weather forecaster- flowers close before rain	Annual ,will self-seed	Herbaceous
Soapwort	Food plant for some butterfly and moth caterpillars	You can make a mild soap from the whole plant	Perennial	Herbaceous
Bluebell	Nectar for bees and other insects	You can make a glue from the bulbs	Perennial	Root layer
Privet	Nectar for Butterflies	Ink from berries	Perennial	Understorey
Alder	Food plant for caterpillars	Dye/ink from bark	Perennial	Canopy
Sloe (blackthorn)	Food plant for black and brown hairstreak caterpillars	Ink from bark. Facemask from ripe fruit.	Perennial	Understorey
Guelder Rose	Nectar for insects, berries for birds	Dye/ink from dried berries	Annual ,will self-seed	Shrub
Nettle	Food plant for caterpillars	Very rich in nitrogen. Makes a good liquid plant feed to promote leafy growth.	Annual ,will self-seed	Herbaceous
Borage	Nectar for bees	The flowers are very pretty and edible.	Perennial	Ground cover
Bramble	Nectar and berries; very important food source for insects, birds and mammals	You can make jam from the fruit, and tea from the young leaves.	Perennial	Shrub
Crab Apple	Fruit for birds	You can make jam from the fruit	Perennial	Understorey
Holly	Berries for birds. Winter shelter for birds. Important food plant for Holly Blue Butterfly.	You can use it to decorate your house at Christmas	Perennial	Understorey
Ivy	Berries are an important source of winter food for birds. Being evergreen, it proves excellent winter shelter for small birds	You can make a dye from berries and leaves.	Perennial	Climbers and ground cover
Honeysuckle	Nectar for birds and insects. Berries for birds and other small animals/.	It has medicinal properties.	Perennial	Climber
Primrose	Nectar for insects seeds for finches	You can make tea.	Perennial	Herbaceous
Cotoneaster	Food plant for the caterpillars of some moth species. Nectar for bees and butterflies. Fruit for birds.	Just look pretty in the garden.	Perennial	Ground cover



Table 2 – Food Crops for School Gardens

Name	Annual/ Perennial	Sow seeds indoors	Plant out	Harvest	Care
Autumn Fruiting raspberries	Perennial	NA	Buy canes and plant in January	September/ October	Cut canes back after fruiting in November
Brussels Sprouts	Annual	Early March	Early-Mid May	October to January	Water well and mulch after planting out
Purple sprouting broccoli	Annual	Early March	Early-Mid May	Following February/ March	Water well and mulch after planting out
Lettuce	Annual	From March onwards	When plants have 5 leaves	May/June	Slug control – beer traps or other organic methods
Pumpkins	Annual	April	Late May	September/ October	Water well and mulch after planting out
Early peas	Annual	Early March	April	June	Keep watered. Support with canes or twigs.
Broad Beans	Annual	Sow directly into ground in February	NA	May/June	Keep watered. Support with canes if they begin to tilt or fall over.
Fruit Trees	Perennial	Plant young trees in the winter months	NA	August- October depending on variety	Water well when planting. Mulch again once a year in Spring. Prune once a year in winter.