



# The buzz around the nectar café...

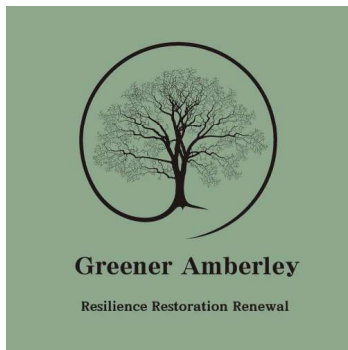
Amberley Gardens Open this year was a fantastic example of what we as a community can achieve, through the diversity of our outstanding gardens.

Diversity matters: a lack of plant diversity would lead to a decline in insect numbers, which in turn would adversely affect birds and other wildlife, and the enjoyment of our gardens. So gardens require our intervention not just to make them look beautiful, but to be vibrant and healthy.



Picture: Pam Keeble

In that context there is a common misconception that “wilding” is somehow about standing back and letting nature take over. On the contrary, in a depleted and fragmented world, our intervention, as the keystone species now, is critical to restore nature processes. By varying the intensity of our interventions and making them more random, as happens in the wild with apex predators, our gardens become more complex and dynamic, fostering a kaleidoscope of life.



A key part of that is the production of nectar and pollen, which allows butterflies, bees and others to thrive, and ultimately ourselves to survive. Setting up a nectar cafe is therefore a laudable ambition for a community renowned for its hospitality and horticultural skill. Let’s aim for a Michelin star.

How can we set up a thriving nectar café? First, get the service up to scratch:

- Avoid using pesticides and herbicides, and slug pellets; there is nothing worse for pollinators. As an alternative, use companion planting, for example
- Mow the lawn less, and allow borders to grow as cover for wildlife, and leave some dead plant matter around for insect nesting
- Provide water: pollinators sometimes need to drink from a shallow pool
- Choose a sheltered sunny spot for planting for pollinators

And then the all important food!

- 🐝 Place each plant in groups so that the colour and scent are easy to detect
- 🐝 Prolong the flowering season – select plants so that you have a show of flowers from early spring to late autumn

🐝 Choose some flowers with a simple, often flat structure, like old cottage varieties, as they are the easiest for insects to feed from

🐝 Provide a night-time feast for moths by planting night-scented flowers such as evening primrose, jasmine and honeysuckle

🐝 Add herbs in the mix because insects love them

🐝 And ivy is a bit of an unsung hero – bees love it, birds use it as cover, and it helps clean the air

A suggested menu is below, but clearly à la carte is available:

Early season	Mid season	Late season
Aubretia*	Heather	Cone flower*
English bluebell	Lady’s bedstraw	French marigold
Currant*	Lavender	Golden rod*
Grape hyacinth	Common mallow	Honeysuckle
Lungwort	Purple toadflax	Ice plant
Primrose	Rock cress	Ivy
Sweet violet	Sea holly	Meadow saffron
Winter aconite	Verbena	Michaelmas daisy
Wood anemone	Wallflower	Common sunflower
Alyssum		

\*Several species

If you follow this advice (extracted more from Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Horticultural Society than the *Michelin Guide* I confess), you are expected to get bountiful and happy customers, particularly once the buzz gets round about what’s on offer in your nectar café. Good luck with the star, if not three!

**Fraser Wheeler**

**Greener Amberley**