■ **FEATURES**

BRING ON THE BEES

Plant the best garden blooms to attract

Any tiny Bristol eco-garden can beat the fancy flower shows. Here, the Voice's in-house naturalist Alex Morss tells you how …

WE ARE about to be bombarded with the famous Chelsea Flower Show in May, along with a season of TV plant programmes and flamboyant, award-winning show gardens. Meanwhile, back in reality, most of us in South Bristol have a tiny yard, or just a windowsill and a buddleia growing out of the wall. And perhaps an overgrown allotment.

So here is a message to Bristol's wildlife gardeners: chill with the mess. Wildlife loves it. Take pride in the small things that you do in your modest space, because nature wasn't meant to be packaged. Reject the temptation to aspire to any gaudy, heavily-marketed aesthetic that looks like a plant equivalent of Crufts, and instead embrace nature and function. For this, you just need quality, not quantity, not neatness, and that means planting with ecology in mind.

A small, scruffy garden is often a useful one, giving wonderful surprises with all its

Attractive to wildlife: Corn marigolds make a show

Red and hairy: A red-tailed bumblebee on a poppy

microhabitats for a wide range of wildlife, rather than just being for you. Wildlife planting will mean it supports part of our ecosystem and twinkles with the colour of butterflies and bees, while being a carnival of happy songbirds, waddling hedgehogs, dancing bats and dazzling dragonflies.

PLANT WITH A PURPOSE

We recently looked at the high value of tiny ponds, hedges for bats and birds, and welcoming hedgehogs, now this month it's time to plant with a purpose.

For easy, low-effort sunny corners, choose drought-tolerant species that hardly ever need watering but are adored by pollinators, such as those adapted to dry sand, gravel,

limestone, Mediterranean or coastal habitats. Among these, the best nectar and pollen food providers include garden catmint, wallflower, rosemary, lavender, sea holly, viper's bugloss, Salvia species such as sage and clary, thyme, alliums, wild basil, marjoram, fennel or wild carrot. If you're on dense clay or have no space, you may wish to try pots, raised beds or a window box.

In Bristol, these particular plants will attract a range of Britain's 25 bumblebee species, such as the brilliantly-named

hairy-footed bumblebee, along with the garden bumblebee, buff-tailed, white-tailed and red-tailed bumblebees. The super-rich nectar will probably lure in at least a dozen or more of our native city butterfly and moth species too.

Whatever your aspect and soil, aim to include a range of flower colours and designs. Long-tongued bees will favour flower tubes, while the short-tongued bees will struggle with those and appreciate shallow shapes. White, blue and yellow flowers are particularly popular for

FIND OUT MORE
Ideas on wildlife gardens from the RHS:
**rhs.org.uk/advice/
profile?PID=551**

RSPB advice on planning a wildlife garden:
**rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/
advice/gardening-for-wildlife/
plants-for-wildlife**

View from a hill: Stunning views waiting to be seen on the Skyline Walk

Discover nearby places

YOU CAN discover more of the natural attractions of our area during Bristol Walk Fest – the largest urban walking event in the UK – in May.

Arnos Vale cemetery hosts several events, including a Boundaries Tour on Saturday May 12. This guided walk explores the wider reaches of the 45-acre woodland, with stories from the graves along the way.

A Spring Flowers Tour takes place at Arnos Vale on Saturday May 26, led by ecologist Mary Wood. Seasonal plants and

native wildlife will be sought on the cemetery's varied habitats, from grassland to woodland, on managed land and wild spaces.

If you fancy a wander by the river, the Friends of Avon New Cut, or Franc, offer a walk called Discovering Plants in Wild Places. It's on May 12 and is led by botanist Dr Clive Lovatt from Bristol Naturalists' Society. He will reveal a surprising variety of plant life on the banks of the River Avon and the New Cut.

Franc also hosts a walk exploring the manmade