

Beneficial Trees, Hedges/Shrubs, Flowers, Herbs and Bulbs for Wildlife in an Urban Area

The built environment of city centers such as the Temple Bar Area, can place a huge stress on the capacity of that area to accommodate wildlife. The effects of the highly developed area can be mitigated by planting trees, hedges/shrubs, flowers, herbs and bulbs that will attract and retain wildlife.

Trees

When planting trees in the city center, much consideration must be paid to “the right tree planted in the right place”. This means, selecting the correct tree (whether it is native or not) that suits the local environment, that is beneficial to the local wildlife and has certain growing attributes such as a small to medium size and can tolerate pollution. The right place for a tree is some where it will have enough light and room to grow properly and a place where it won't get badly damaged. Below is an introduction to some of the trees that can be planted in city center areas.



Plate 36: The Mountain Ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*), the Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and the Alder (*Alnus*) are native Irish small trees which support an abundance of bird and insect species throughout the year.

The **Mountain Ash** tree is a native to Ireland and it can be used as a street tree quite easily as it can survive in moderately fertile soils (slightly acidic) and can tolerate pollution. In the early summer it produces an abundant number of small, white, nectar-rich flowers which attract large amounts of bees and in the Autumn the red berries produced by the plant support a wide range of birds. Moths, such as the brimstone and underwing, also feed on the leaves.

The **Hawthorn** tree/hedge is also native to Ireland and it also can be used as a street tree as it can grow in dry and wet soil and it too can tolerate pollution. Hawthorn supports many insects the caterpillars of over 70 species of moth and is an important nectar source for bees early in the year. The berries also provide vital winter food supplies for birds such as redwings and field fares.

As well as the two trees above, there are other trees which can be considered for urban planting: **Alder** (*Alnus*): this fast-growing native tree grows well in wet conditions and it provides an excellent habitat for birds and wildlife for shelter, nesting and as a food source for moths.

Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*): this attractive native tree can be used in an urban setting as it is fast growing and it can grow in water logged soil. The seeds attract finches and many other small birds. The caterpillars of about 30 moth species as well as many other insects feed on the leaves.

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Hedging

Hedges in an urban area can be used effectively to create small habitats for wildlife when there is not enough room for trees. Hedge plants can be planted in a continuous row to give the “Hedge” appearance, or they can be planted as a shrub. Below are some of native and non-native hedging plants.



Plate 37: A Holly hedge in Autumn with ripe red berries which attract many foraging birds.

Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is a native species and it can be grown in an urban area. It can tolerate shade and it requires a slightly acidic soil. It is slow growing, so it is best used in a mixed hedge scenario. Its small white flowers in spring are packed with nectar which attract many insects including the Holly Blue Butterfly and the red berries are eaten by Robins and Thrushes in the winter.

Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) is not native to Ireland, however, it can be used effectively as a hedge in urban areas as it is shade tolerant and it can grow in a wide range of soil types. Beech nuts are attractive to squirrels and birds and the leaves provide food for caterpillars of over 20 moth species.

Hazel (*Corylus avellane*) is a native tree/hedge and it can grow in most soils and in partial shade. It is an important plant for wildlife as it can support many species of birds, insects and mammals. Bees feed on the early source of pollen and birds eat the nuts.



Plate 38: The Mountain Ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*), the Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and the Alder (*Alnus*) are native Irish small trees which support an abundance of bird and insect species throughout the year.

Beneficial Trees, Hedges/Shrubs, Flowers, Herbs and Bulbs for Wildlife in an Urban Area (*continued*)

The following plants can be grown in a mixed hedge or simply by themselves. **Cotoneaster** (*Cotoneaster lacteus*), **Firethorn** (*Pyracantha coccinea*) and **Elderberry** (*Sambucus nigra*) produce nectar rich flowers which attract bees and other insects and insect eating birds. They also produce copious amounts of berries which are eaten by finches, blackbirds and sparrows.

The following plants can again be simply grown by themselves. **Common Lilac** (*Syringa vulgaris*), **Butterfly Bush** (*Buddleia davidii*) and **Skimmia** (*Skimmia japonica*) produce a vast amount of nectar rich flowers which are very popular with bees, hoverflies and butterflies. The seeds and fruits are eaten by birds when food becomes scarce in Autumn and the plants are often used for nesting.

Wildflowers

Planting wildflowers is an amazing way of greatly increasing the abundance and variety of wildlife in any area. It is also notably an easy way of increasing the amenity value of an area as a beautiful array of different shaped and coloured flowers is always pleasing to the eye. The annual, biennial and perennial flowers below create a huge resource for insects and birds. All the flowers are laden with nectar and attract a vast abundance of pollinating honeybees, bumblebees, hoverflies, day-flying moths and butterflies. In turn, these insects will attract insect eating birds and birds will feed on the seeds of certain flowers. Some of these flowers, such as the Foxglove, also provide an over wintering habitat for certain insects. Below is a list of some of the beneficial flowers that can be planted and grown in an urban area such as the Temple Bar District. All of these flowers can be grown in window boxes, large containers and plant pots with ease. The wildflower plants below are divided here into two sections due to their life cycles.

1. Annuals and Biennials: which are plants that complete their lifecycles (lives, flowers and dies) in a single year or two years respectively. Below is a list of some of the best wildlife enhancing flowers that can be grown in an urban area.

Lobelia (*Lobelia erinus*), **Sunflower** (*Helianthus annuus*), **Foxglove** (*Digitalis purpurea*), **English Marigold** (*Calendula officinalis*), **Borage** (*Borago officinalis*), **Sweet William** (*Dianthus barbatus*), **Wallflower** (*Erysimum cheiri*), **Poached Egg Plant** (*Limnanthes douglasii*), **Petunia** (*Petunia x hybrida*), **Nasturtium** (*Tropaeolum majus*), **Tall Verbena** (*Verbena bonariensis*), **French Marigold** (*Tagetes patula*), **Phacelia** (*Phacelia tanacetifolia*) and **Love-Lies-Bleeding** (*Amaranthus caudatus*).



Plate 39: Sunflowers, Foxgloves and Nasturtiums in flower attracting bees, butterflies and hoverflies.

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2. Perennials: which are plants that continue to live where they are planted for many years. Below is a list of some of the best wildlife enhancing flowers that can be grown in an urban area. These flowers are longer living and therefore would favour a permanent planting site such as a large container box.

Lupin (*Lupinus nootkatensis*), **Dahlia** (*Dahlia Collette Group*), **Perennial Cornflower** (*Centaurea montana*), **Geranium** (*Geranium maculatum*), **Coneflower** (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), **Cowslip** (*Primula veris*), **Scabious** (*Scabiosa caucasica*), **Golden Rod** (*Solidago virgaurea*), **Mullein** (*Verbascum olympicum*), **Sweet violet** (*Viola odorata*), **Ice Plant** (Syn. *Sedum spectabile*), **Red Valerian** (*Centranthus ruber*), **Yellow Chamomile** (*Anthemis tinctorial*) and **Yellow Alyssum** (*Aurinia saxatilis*).



Plate 40: Lupins, Geraniums and Coneflowers all in flower, creating nectar rich food source for many insects and also providing food for the birds who feed on the insects.

Herbs

Herbs have been grown and used for thousands of years to flavor and preserve food, treat ailments, ward off pests and diseases, freshen the air, and decorate and enhance people's lives. These herbs can also create a bountiful array of nectar rich flowers for a vast number of bees, hoverflies and butterflies, and again can create habitats for spiders, beetles and hibernating insects. Herbs such as Lavender and Spearmint also provide a welcome food source with their seeds in Autumn for birds. The herbs below can be grown in container boxes and plant pots.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), **Common Sage** (*Salvia officinalis*), **Thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*), **Dill** (*Anethum graveolens*), **Caraway** (*Carum carvi*), **Lavender** (*Lavandula angustifolia*), **Lemon Balm** (*Melissa officinalis*), **Tansy** (*Tanacetum vulgare*), **Sweet Marjoram** (*Origanum majorana*) and **Spearmint** (*Mentha spicata*).



Plate 41: Rosemary, Sage and Thyme, tasty and medicinal herbs that are also beneficial to the local wildlife.