

Inistioge TidyTowns: Plants for encouraging pollinators

By Dr Fiona Mac Gowan, Consulting Ecologist & Botanist, May 2018

When she visited Inistioge in May 2018, Dr Fiona McGowan gave suggestions for each bed of plants in the public areas of the village. It was a great opportunity for the village to avail of such expertise. Our thanks to Fiona and to the Heritage Office of Kilkenny County Council who sponsored the work. All plants are pollinator-friendly but specific plants are recommended to do well in the different conditions e.g wet or dry. All the lists are meant to provide guidance not just for 2018 but on into the future as more funds or even cuttings from local gardens become available!

Also, the lists aren't necessarily meant to be confined to the flowerbed described. All the species listed are good for biodiversity and can be used in other flowerbeds or parts of the town e.g. your garden! Therefore, we want to share them with all our gardeners and we hope you find the list helpful in making a choice for your own garden conditions.

Let us know how you get on – and if you have any cuttings or plants you have divided that are pollinator-friendly let us know, too. We might have a fundraising plant sale in the autumn!

Flowerbed locations around Inistioge:

1. New Car Park, Thomastown Road

Conditions: Poor soil, dry, needs ground cover

The prostrate shrubs *Juniper communis* and *Cotoneaster* are recommended. Some heathers may also be suitable here: *Calluna vulgaris* for late summer flowering and *Erica erigena* for spring flowering.

2. Bed at pedestrian entrance to Thomastown Road car park

Conditions: New bed about 2.5 metres deep in front of old wall that needs disguising

This bed is backed by a low wall so the shrubs **Shrubby cinquefoil (*Potentilla erecta*)** and **Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)** are recommended along here. It might also be worth planting a couple of **Honeysuckle (a.k.a Woodbine) (*Lonicera periclymenum*)** to grow along the wall, their strongly scented flowers will enhance any evening walks in this area. The front part of the bed could be planted with a mix of pollinator-friendly herbaceous perennials such as: **Hardy Geraniums/Cranesbills (*Geranium spp*)** in a mix of colours, blue, pink and white. These plants (particularly blue varieties such as 'Johnson's blue') partner well with **Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*)** which could be planted along the edge of the bed. **Lenten Hellebores (*Helleborus orientalis*)** will give winter and spring interest. The **Common Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*)**, is a great flower for pollinators and despite it's being an annual, it seeds itself and often doesn't need humans to re-sow it for several years so the seeds are excellent value for money and their bright orange goes beautifully with blue hardy geraniums. **Forget-me-nots (*Myositis*)** may also be good in this bed for later spring colour.

3. The Hatchery

Conditions: Near water, shady, sunken from the road.

The Hatchery flower bed just needs a little rejuvenating, some tall plants might be good here as the bed is a bit of a distance below the wall that people will see it from. Good tall perennials are: **Foxgloves (*Digitalis* spp)** – both pink and white varieties; **Japanese anemones (*Anemone x hybrid*)** again both pink and white varieties; ***Verbena bonariensis***; **Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)**; **Teasel (*Dipsacus* sp.)**. Some ***Rudbeckia*** daisies will add bold colour too.

4. St Colmcille's Well garden

Conditions: Well-established garden in need of some rejuvination

The Well garden is beautiful with a good selection of pollinator-friendly plants already in situ. Some plants have clearly reached the end of their life cycle and need to be cleared. The following plants are recommended to be planted in their stead:

Tall perennials (for the back of beds): **Japanese anemones (*Anemone x hybrid*)** – pink and white (Autumn); ***Verbena bonariensis*** (late Summer); **Foxgloves (*Digitalis* spp)** (early Summer) – both pink and white varieties; **Mullein (*Verbascum* spp)** (Summer);

Shorter perennials: ***Sedum 'Autumn Joy'*** (Autumn); **Hardy geraniums** (Summer flowering Cranesbills); ***Astrantia major*** (long flowering from Summer into Autumn); **Yarrow (*Achillea* spp)** (Summer); **Avens (*Geum* sp.)** – brightly coloured with long-lasting flowers; **Columbine/Granny's bonnet (*Aquilegia* sp)** (early summer) and **Macedonian scabious (*Knautia macedonica*)**.

5. Millennium Garden

Conditions: Dry and windy, established beds but with bare patches

Again this area just needs a little rejuvenation. I understand it is a windy area so tall plants aren't suitable. Many of the plants present are doing well but there are some gaps and some tired plants that need to be cleared away. Recommended perennials would be: **Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*)**; **Tussock bellflower (*Campanula carpatica*)**; **Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)**; **English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)**; **Thyme (*Thymus* spp)** and **Forget-me-not (*Myosotis* spp)**. Low growing spring bulbs (such as **snowdrops** and **crocus**) would also be good additions here to give early season interest in this very visible bed in the town centre.

6. Wet riverside bed

Conditions: Prone to annual flooding

There are problems with flower beds in the River Park being flooded each year so here are a list of native, pollinator friendly plants that normally grow in areas that periodically flood and therefore should be happy in this situation: **Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)**, there are cream and pink flowering varieties; **Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum* sp.)** pretty, tall pink-purple spikes; **Ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*)** and **Water avens (*Geum rivale*)**. The **Royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*)** is a native fern that would give a good 'architectural' centrepiece to the planting in these beds. It normally grows in boggy situations so it should be happy here.

7. Hedgerow in area that floods

The other shrubs that appear to be doing well here, despite winter flooding are **Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)** and **Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)**. The existing hedge can be filled out using these species. **Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)** also does well where there is periodical flooding but it may not be possible to buy plants due to constraints caused by the recent arrival of Ash dieback disease to Ireland. It is hoped that a percentage of native Ash trees will show resistance to the disease and then these plants can be propagated but this process will take several years.

General list of shrub and tree species recommended for biodiversity enhancement:

(a). Hedges

Using the local hedgerows as the cue for which species to plant, the following are recommended:

- Hawthorn/Whitethorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
- Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)
- Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)
- Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)
- Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*)
- Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)
- Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*)
- Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*)
- Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)

Several Oak (*Quercus robur*) trees should also be planted along the hedges as mature trees every so often along the length of a hedge greatly add to its biodiversity value.

It is very important that all the plants are sourced in Ireland and locally if at all possible as this ensures the plants will be adapted to the local conditions and the genetic make-up of local native plants will not be disturbed. One method of ensuring this would be to collect seed from local plants and grow them for planting. This is not always practical as it would mean the hedge could not be planted for several years. However, this method could be used particularly in the collection of local Ash and Oak seed and it would make an ideal project for local schoolchildren to become involved in. A point to note here is that if you do source your trees and shrubs from a nursery always make sure to ask if the plants are sourced in Ireland – in addition to helping you find an Irish supply it will also raise awareness amongst nurseries of the importance of this factor.

(b) Wildlife-friendly tree species

Trees recommended for planting are:

- Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) – prefers neutral/limestone soils
- Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) – prefers slightly acid soils
- Willow (*Salix* spp) – good for damp/ waterside conditions
- Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) – likes neutral to limey soils
- Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)– good for damp/ waterside conditions
- Aspen (*Populus tremula*)
- Silver birch (*Betula pendula*)
- Downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) - good for damp/ waterside conditions
- Yew (*Taxus baccata*) – note that 'fastigiata' is the upright form (Irish Yew)
- Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)
- Rowan/Mountain ash (*Sorbus aucuparia*) – flowers and fruit for spring and autumn interest
- Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) – flowers and fruit for spring and autumn interest
- Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*) – flowers and fruit for spring and autumn interest
- Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) – flowers in spring and colourful fruit and leaves in autumn

(c) Wildlife-friendly shrub species

- Fruit bushes e.g. the native Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) and Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*). Also Currants and Gooseberries (*Ribes* spp.).
- Ling heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) - prefers acid/peaty soil conditions
- Bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) - prefers acid/peaty soil conditions
- Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) terrific colour, blooming through April & May.
- Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*)* - good ground cover, particularly on sloped beds
- Firethorn (*Pyracantha*)* - a very thorny climber, good for wall cover with creamy blossoms in summer and colourful berries in autumn. Different species have different coloured berries ranging from yellow through orange to scarlet red.
- Honeysuckle/Woodbine (*Lonicera periclymenum*) – a climber with beautifully scented flowers, particularly in the evening when they attract nectar-seeking moths.
- Dog rose (*Rosa canina*) – a climber with beautiful flowers in June and red rosehips in autumn.
- Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) – creamy flowers (most important ingredient in a very tasty cordial!) in June and black berries in autumn (also edible, great for jams and jellies)
- Spindle tree (*Euonymus europaeus*) – strikingly beautiful orange seeds carried in bright pink capsules called 'cardinals' hats'
- Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) – featuring sloe berries in autumn
- Purging Buckthorn (*Rhamnus catharticus*) – an uncommon shrub – the favourite food plant of the Brimstone butterfly
- Alder-buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*)
- Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*)
- Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) – beautiful flowers and berries, see pictures above.
- Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) – the heady, coconut aroma of its bright yellow flowers is the smell of an Irish summer's day.

*indicates a species not native to Ireland but non-invasive and wildlife friendly.