



Stratford in Bloom - Growing Together



**Hello everyone
and welcome to
our 1st newsletter.**

Stratford in Bloom is an independent community group that works very closely with Stratford Town Council and Stratford District Council. Our aims are to enhance the visual attraction of Stratford upon Avon by encouraging the cultivation of plants

and flowers in gardens and to encourage businesses to create floral displays to adorn their premises. We also work with schools and nursery schools and hope to encourage young people to develop an appreciation of their natural environment.

Our annual floral competitions are well known throughout the town and we encourage as many people as possible to take part. From front gardens, community gardens, wildlife friendly, businesses, schools and nursery schools, we love to judge them all.

We are lucky to live in an area with so much greenery, enough to inspire even the most amateur of gardeners.

Each year we adopt a different colour theme for our summer planting in and around town. This year our colours will be oranges, yellows and pinks. We ensure that we compliment Stratford District Council's colour scheme too.



Town Floral Displays

In June our summer floral displays will once again adorn the town. Our hanging and barrier baskets, ground planters and floral towers will be a mixture of trailing and eye-catching plants rich in nectar.

A big thank you to our contractor, Alan and his team at Plantscape and the Town Council's Open

Space's team for all their hard work in supporting us. We always have so many people telling us how vibrant and colourful the town is, and 2025 will be no exception!

Our focus as always is wildlife and insect friendly and it is so lovely to see the bees collecting their pollen when strolling around town.

In the Autumn last year we installed winter planting with the help of a small grant from Stratford Town Trust. This is something that we would like to continue to do as the plants brought some colour and life to our streets over the long winter months.



Spring cut backs

It became a twentieth century tradition to 'put the garden to bed' for winter: cutting dead stems back to the ground, making sure every last autumn leaf was tidied away and covering beds with manure or compost. The reality is that the garden doesn't really go to sleep. It does slow down, but life goes on and many plants and animals still go about their usual business,

albeit at a diminished pace.

We now know that leaving the dead stems on perennial plants may help protect the crown of the plant during cold snaps, their seeds can help feed garden birds and they look fantastic when

bejewelled by frost. The leaves dropped by deciduous trees can also help protect plants and soil, and will be taken down into the ground by hungry earthworms in milder spells. Where there are lots of leaves, they are still best cleared (and can be used to make wonderful leafmould), but a few left on beds will be beneficial. It may look and feel nice to spread manure or compost in the autumn, but as most plants are not actively growing, a lot of the valuable nutrients will leach away. It is much better to save these precious materials and only apply them from March onwards, when plants and soil life can really utilise them.

This does all mean a little more work for the spring, but probably less effort overall and the life that shares our gardens will do better off as a result of our more gentle or timely interventions.



Blooming now – herbaceous perennials

Spring bulbs provide a familiar and welcome splash of bright colour as we emerge from the winter. A little more overlooked are the many herbaceous perennials that bloom in spring, often providing some of the best food for early emerging pollinators. ('Herbaceous' describes plants which die back to the ground but come back year after year.)

One of the prettiest early bloomers is lungwort, also known as pulmonaria. Depending on the variety and location, this can be in bloom from mid-February, providing ground cover with petite bell-shaped blooms in a range of shades including white, pink, purple and brilliant blues. In particular, the Common Carder Bee (a type of bumblebee) likes to feed on the flowers.

Hellebores are another herbaceous plant that flower in early spring. Like pulmonaria, hellebores come in a range of colours and have an unusually large and impressively structured flower for the time of year.

Primroses (both the wild, pale yellow sort and cultivated forms) also provide valuable pollen and nectar at this time of year. These are equally at home in formal beds, beneath deciduous trees or can become naturalised in lawns that are not too closely cut.

Many early spring plants are useful for filling gaps in slightly darker parts of the garden as they will tolerate semi-shade. They are predominantly woodland or woodland edge plants, with a mission to get their flowering done before deciduous trees get their leaves. After flowering, herbaceous perennials like these can be lifted and divided to create more plants – this is particularly effective for larger, older clumps which are reinvigorated by the process.

Starting a pond

Spring can also be a good time of year to start a pond for wildlife, which will be colonised through the following summer. There are various online resources available to give hints and tips on creating ponds, but some of the most important things to bear in mind are:

- *To have sloping sides, so that hedgehogs or other animals who may fall in can climb out again.*
- *To try and have a deep area where creatures can retreat to in the depths of winter.*
- *There is a wonderful range of aquatic and marginal plants available that will grow in water/ wet margins (but do be careful about introducing invasive species).*

We hope to provide some tips on pond maintenance in late summer, which is normally the best time of year to carry out these actions.

Friends of Stratford Station

The train station is one of the main entrances into our town for our numerous visitors. FOSS and Stratford in Bloom are keen to enhance it and make it somewhere to be proud of.

The horticultural volunteers headed up by Cllr Jenny Fradgley have been working hard to ensure our Railway station is kept beautiful and attractive to both travellers and pollinators. The volunteers are working hard to maintain the displays, watering, weeding and deadheading and receive praise from train staff and the public when they are carrying out their work on the platforms.

If anyone is passionate about the environment and would like to get involved in working with Stratford in Bloom, please contact our Secretary Sue England at sueengland@btinternet.com.

With best wishes for a pleasant Spring.

Stratford in Bloom

