How to Attract Bees to Your Garden
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It is an undeniable fact that bees play a crucial part in pollinating our plants all around the world. Without bees, many of the fruits and vegetables we rely on would not even exist. Over the past few years, though, there has been a noticeable decrease in the bee population—especially Honeybees. So, what can we, as gardeners, do to keep bees around and healthy?

Simply put: If every vegetable gardener created a bee-friendly area in their gardens by also growing flowers that attract and feed bees, not only would it help the bee population, it would also create beautiful flowers for everyone to enjoy! This is just one way to help the bees. Other ways we can help include planting native plants to attract bees and spreading the word about the importance of conserving pollinators.

Read on to learn about the most common bees and what you can do to create your very own backyard bee haven.

Bee Basics: The Three Most Common Garden Bee Species

There are hundreds of different bee species, but the three most common bees you’ll find in your garden are the mason bee, bumblebee, and the honeybee.

![Mason Bee](image)

- Mason bees are usually a little smaller than a honeybee and typically metallic blue or blue-black in color. Some may be reddish-brown in color.
- They get their name from their nest-building style, which is to seal off the cells where they lay their eggs, with mud.
- There are about 140 species of mason bees in North America and they are all solitary creatures.
- Male Mason Bees do not have stingers, and the females will only sting if trapped or squeezed; making them a perfect, non-threatening garden guest.
- Mason bees are extremely effective pollinators. Just two or three females can pollinate an entire apple tree!
- Mason bees will also work in cool or rainy weather when honeybees are more likely to take the day off.

Grow these for Mason bees: Asters, Black-eyed Susans, Hyacinth, Bee balm, Zinnias
Bumblebee

- Bumblebees are most common in temperate climates.
- Bumblebees are thick and hairy and average about 0.6 to 1 inch in length. They’re usually black with broad yellow or orange bands.
- Unlike most native bees, but similar to honey bees, bumblebees are social insects that live in colonies.
- Located underground and usually made in deserted bird or mouse nests, bumblebee nests contain anywhere between 50 and 500 individuals.
- Bumblebee colonies die in late fall, except for new queens, which hibernate during winter. Queens survive winter in small holes beneath the ground’s surface, emerging in spring to create new colonies by laying eggs.
- Bumblebees do not produce honey, but their excellent pollination services are worth more than honey.

*Grow these for Bumblebees:* Daisies, Zinnias, Asters, Queen Anne’s lace

Honeybee

- All honeybees are social and cooperative insects. A hive’s inhabitants are generally divided into three types: workers, drones and queen.
- The average worker bee lives for just five to six weeks. During this time, she’ll produce around a twelfth of a teaspoon of honey. The queen can live up to five years and is busiest in the summer months, when she can lay up to 2,500 eggs a day!
- The average honeybee spends seven days a week collecting nectar and pollen along with its 70,000 hive-mates.
- Honey bees live on stored honey and pollen all winter and cluster into a ball to conserve warmth.
- Each honeybee has 170 odorant receptors, which they use to communicate within the hive and to recognize different types of flowers when looking for food.

*Grow these for Honeybees:* Sunflowers, Black-eyed Susans, Asters, Goldenrod, Clover
Friendly Flowers: Pretty Plants That Attract Bees

As vegetable gardeners, we know that bees are already attracted to the yellow blossoms on squash, cucumbers, and tomatoes. But there are several other things to keep in mind when planning your bee-friendly garden, which will also help with your vegetable pollination. Generally active from early spring through late fall, bees need access to nectar and pollen-producing flowers for their entire busy season.

1. The first step to a creating a bee friendly garden is to plant native species and wildflowers, as these will produce the most enticing nectar. If you need some ideas for what to plant in your local area, the Xerces Society has some awesome resources including pollinator-friendly plant lists which are categorized by region.

2. It’s best to grow a variety of plants with flowers in a range of colors that bloom from spring through autumn – the showier, the better. As you’re selecting flowers, remember that bees are highly attracted to white, yellow, and shades of purple and blue.

3. Plants with flat, single blossoms are best, as they are providing the bees easy accessibility to the nectar.

**Pro tip:** avoid planting red flowers since bees can’t see the color red, and it appears to be too much like the surrounding green leaves for them.

Luckily for many EarthBox® gardeners, it’s relatively easy to attract bees to your yard—the EarthBox® gardening system doesn’t require a lot of space, and is easy to care for. The most important thing is to provide the right types of flowers.

Here are our favorites:

A. **Stoke’s Aster** has cornflower flowerheads, in lavender, blue, pink, white, or yellow.

B. **Baptisia** is a perennial that is low-maintenance and stands up to heat and dry conditions.

C. **Coneflowers** are a must in perennial gardens that attract bees; they tolerate tough conditions like summer heat and dry stretches.

D. **Black-eyed Susans** are in showoff mode from summer into early autumn.

E. **Verbena** has consistent, striking blooms from spring through late summer and even to early frost.

F. **Blazing Star** grows high its dramatic colors ranging from deep pink to purple-pink.

G. **Blue Fortune** is covered with tiny, tubular, violet-blue flowers.

![Flower Images]

Not only will you be helping to save the bees by planting bee-friendly plants, you’ll also be creating a beautiful garden to enjoy. To improve your chances of attracting bees, avoid hybrid flowers—which may be sterile and have little or no nectar or pollen—choosing heirloom flowers instead. You’ll also want to skip the double flowers, which lack pollen altogether.
A Warm Welcome: Creating a Healthy Home for Beneficial Insects

You can build a simple bee hotel for nesting out of weathered wood scraps, broken twigs, branches, dried grasses, hollowed bamboo, and other natural materials to help encourage bees to stick around your yard and garden.

Many bugs are beneficial to the garden. Some of our favorite beneficial insects include praying mantises, orb weaver spiders, and ladybugs—which all help catch and destroy the destructive insects that harm your garden.

Other beneficial bugs we LOVE are bees and butterflies! They are vital to growing food because of the excellent pollination services they provide. Besides flowers, many of our favorite fruits and nuts would not be possible without the help of bees. Contrary to popular belief, many common garden bees are not aggressive and won’t sting unless they feel threatened.

Remember the following when tending to your garden:

- **Nesting Sites:** whether it’s underground holes, or aboveground in abandoned bird nests, grass piles, hollow logs, or spaces beneath rocks—don’t disturb them.
- **Off-Season Hibernation:** most queens hibernate over winter in small holes on or just below the ground’s surface; avoid raking, tilling or mowing your yard until April or May.
- **Spray responsibly:** both insecticides and most herbicides should be totally avoided, as many are poisonous to bees. When treating plants with fungicides or any other sprays or dusts, wait until after dusk when bees are inactive. Never spray or dust when it’s windy.
- **Provide clean water:** bees will appreciate a large shallow dish or birdbath with stones and pebbles that stick out above the water so they can rest and get a drink. Once your flowers have bloomed and the bees have come buzzing, make sure you’re properly caring for your new friends and their new home. Once you get started, you’ll find it’s easy to be a home vegetable gardener who maintains and encourages the presence of the beneficial bee.