Bee Plants

Every garden needs pollinators and bees are among the best. Without them there would be limited flowers and even fewer fruits and vegetables. Every third bite of food you eat comes from a bee pollinated food and without sufficient healthy bees food could cost over 20 times more than it does presently. Bees are basically looking for 2 things when they visit your yard: 1. Nectar - nectar is loaded with sugars and it's a bee's main source of energy. 2. Pollen - pollen provides the balanced diet of proteins and fats.

Many popular flower varieties are hybridized for features that are valued by the gardener, like disease resistance, flower size or color and bigger, longer blooms. Unfortunately much hybridization has reduced the production of nectar and pollen and sometimes leaves the resulting plant completely sterile and useless to bees and other pollinators. Another factor is that the amount of nectar secreted is dependent of climate conditions such as temperature, humidity and moisture in the soil. Generally you should choose single blooming plants rather than doubles (e.g. single flowered hollyhocks rather than double flowered).

To help bees and other pollinator insects you should provide a range of plants that will offer a succession of flowers, and thus pollen and nectar, through the whole growing season. Patches of foraging habitat can be created in many different locations, from backyards and school grounds to golf courses and city parks. Even a small area planted with good flowers will be beneficial for local bees, because each patch will add to the mosaic of habitat available to bees and other pollinators. There are also many garden plants—particularly older, heirloom varieties of perennials and herbs—that are good sources of nectar or pollen. Together with native plants, these will make a garden attractive to both pollinators and people.

General Gardening Advice for Attracting Bees and Other Pollinators

1. Don't use pesticides. Most pesticides are not selective. You are killing off the beneficial bugs along with the pests. If you must use a pesticide, start with the least toxic one and follow the label instructions to the letter.

2. Chose several colors of flowers. Bees have good color vision to help them find flowers and the nectar and pollen they offer. Flower colors that particularly attract bees are blue, purple, violet, white, and yellow.

3. Plant flowers in clumps. Flowers clustered into clumps of one species will attract more pollinators than individual plants scattered through the habitat patch. Where space allows, make the clumps four feet or more in diameter.

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4. Include flowers of different shapes. There are four thousand different species of bees in North America, and they are all different sizes, have different tongue lengths, and will feed on different shaped flowers. Consequently, providing a range of flower shapes means more bees can benefit.

5. Have a diversity of plants flowering all season. Most bee species are generalists, feeding on a range of plants through their life cycle. By having several plant species flowering at once, and a sequence of plants flowering through spring, summer, and fall, you can support a range of bee species that fly at different times of the season.

6. Plant where bees will visit. Bees favor sunny spots over shade and need some shelter from strong winds.

Here's a list of locally available plants to help provide multiple food sources for your bees:

- Aster *Aster*
- Basil *Ocimum*
- Black-eyed Susan *Rudbeckia*
- Caltrop *Kallstroemia*
- Caryopteris *Caryopteris*
- Cotoneaster *Cotoneaster*
- Currant *Ribes*
- Elder *Sambucus*
- English lavender *Lavandula*
- Giant hyssop *Agastache*
- Globe thistle *Echinops*
- Goldenrod *Solidago*
- Honeysuckle *Lonicera*
- Joe-pye weed *Eupatorium*
- Lupine *Lupinus*
- Marjoram *Origanum*
- Oregon grape *Berberis*
- Penstemon *Penstemon*
- Purple coneflower *Echinacea*
- Rabbit-brush *Chrysothamnus*
- Rhododendron *Rhododendron*
- Rosemary *Rosmarinus*
- Sage *Salvia*
- Scorpion-weed *Phacelia*
- Snowberry *Symphoricarpos*
- Stonecrop *Sedum*
- Sunflower *Helianthus*
- Trumpet Vine *Campsis radicans*
- Wallflower *Erysimum*
- Wild buckwheat *Eriogonum*
- Wild-lilac *Ceanothus*
- Willow *Salix*
- Zinnia *Zinnia*

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