



Create a Bee-Friendly Urban Garden

We Can't Live Without Bees

Bees are supremely important to our natural world.

We need bees to grow food. Many of our delicious and health-giving fruits, vegetables, and herbs come from flowering plants pollinated by bees. According to the USDA, one out of three bites of food we eat is the result of honeybee pollination! When the bees suffers, so does our food supply. USGS biologist Sam Droege called bees our “indigenous, unpaid, and invisible workforce.”

Bees pollinate our gardens, meadows, and forests. They also pollinate alfalfa and clover that provide feed for cattle, and pollinate trees that provide nuts, seeds, and fruit that sustain birds and other wildlife.

The world's bee population is declining, due to pesticides, parasites, and the decline in natural habitat. More and more gardeners want to do their part in helping the bees. You can contribute to sustaining our earth by creating a bee-friendly garden. In return, the bees will provide you with beautiful and bountiful flowers, fruits, vegetables, and seeds. Bees are also great fun to watch! (Nothing compares to the ecstasy of a bee rolling around in a nectar-filled thistle!)

Romancing the Bee

Here are some tips for creating a bee-friendly garden:

- Plant for the bees! Choose bee-friendly plants, vegetables, herbs, shrubs, and trees whose pollen and nectar will feed the bees and help them increase their numbers.

- Buy only certified organic plants and seeds. Even the “bee-friendly” plants you buy at nurseries may be pre-treated with insecticides containing neonicotinoids (neonics for short), which are particularly detrimental to bee health.
- Plan for blooms year-round. Plant a variety of plants so that your garden will be in bloom throughout as many seasons as possible. This will provide bees with a constant source of food. Bees also are stronger and healthier with access to pollen from a variety of sources.
- Replace part or all of your lawn with flowering plants, shrubs, and trees which provide food and habitat for bees.
- Tolerate a little mess! If you have a lawn, stop mowing some portion...you’d be surprised what flowers will show up over time! Clover, dandelion, and dead red nettle are all very beneficial to bees.
- Create a herb garden. Herbs are the most useful plants for attracting bees to the garden.
- Construct a bee bath. Bees need fresh, clean water for drinking and bathing. Set up a shallow water tray (or fountain, if you have the space and inclination) with small rocks in it for your garden bees. Make sure you change the water daily or provide a very slow drip rate to keep the water moving (to limit mosquitoes).
- Say no to pesticides (insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides like RoundUp). Colony losses of the honeybee are linked to pesticide use, among other factors.

If you *must* use pesticides, use all-natural, organic pesticides, and don’t apply pesticides when plants are in bloom or when bees are active (during the daytime).

- Allow small plants like clover in your yard instead of trying to eradicate them.



- Provide bee habitat. Bees need protection from severe weather and predators and places to nest and roost. Did you know that most bees do not nest in hives? (In nature, honeybees nest in tree cavities.) There are 4,000 kinds (species) of bees in the U.S. and Canada and seventy percent of wild bees live in the ground.
 - Trees, hedgerows and shrubs can provide nesting opportunities for bees.
 - A corner of yard free of lawn, mulch or ground cloth also can provide nesting opportunities for wild bees.
 - A nesting box for bumblebees or a wooden block with holes can provide habitat for cavity-dwelling bees.

What Else Can You Do?

- Buy local, organically-grown fruits, vegetables, and honey that help support beekeepers in your area. Three Part Harmony Farm grows native Washingtonian seedlings without synthetic chemicals in a small greenhouse in Petworth. Their seedlings are available at Petworth farmer's market on Saturdays and at Annie's Ace Hardware in Petworth and Brookland.
- Teach your children and grandchildren to distinguish between honey bees (that rarely sting) and creatures (non-bees) that do, such as yellow jackets and hornets.
- Share your bee and garden photos to inspire others.
- Support current bills and other pollinator initiatives, learn more about the issues facing pollinators, and spread the word to those around you.