



Bee Facts

Do you want to catch the buzz on bees? Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions.

Q: Do all bees sting?

A: No, most don't even have stingers!

Q: Why does it seem like there are more bees in spring and fall?

A: Most native bees do not live very long. Sometimes females will hibernate, spending winter in insulated nests underground or in hollow vegetation. Other species will survive the winter months as eggs or pupa. In the spring, when the eggs hatch and larvae mature into adults, a colony will typically be at its greatest size (for example, a honey bee colony may have more than 80,000 individual bees). Other bees build up a population throughout summer and reach peak numbers in the fall. Most bee colonies are small, with fewer than 100 individuals.

Q: What is the difference between a bee, a wasp and a yellow jacket?

A: Bees and yellow jackets are different types of wasps. Wasps use their stingers to prey on other insects. Some wasps can be parasitic on pest insects like cockroaches. Wasps are usually predators, but bees feed on pollen and nectar so they don't need stingers. Bees have body hair to help collect pollen. Some of the most unusual bees will eat carrion. The aggressive yellow jacket looks a bit like a honey bee but is another kind of wasp that can use their stinger multiple times.

Q: Why do honey bees swarm?

A: If you believe the cartoons, honey bee swarms are a scary sight. Swarms are large numbers of bees moving cohesively. But a true bee swarm is a rare sight. Bees swarm when they need to create a new hive as a result of overcrowding or excess food. Swarms are short-lived and protect the new queen as she moves from her birth hive to a new hive.

Q: Do bees live in holes in the ground?

A: Many native bees nest in the ground. These bees often are solitary, although they may nest near other solitary bees in beetowns. Ground-nesting bees usually are solitary and stingless and therefore harmless. Bumblebees are the exception, being both ground nesting and having stingers. Although the mounds of earth near nest openings can be unattractive, in general, these bees and their nests are beneficial.

Q: Are bees endangered?

A: As with all native pollinators, bees are becoming rarer and may become endangered by lack of habitat and nectar sources. Non-native European honey bees have suffered large declines in recent years, affecting agriculture, honey production and beekeepers (apiarists).

Q: What is the largest bee (hymenoptera)?

A: The largest bee-like insect you're likely to see is the cicada killer. Really a wasp, the female is bigger than the male, but both can be over an inch long. Adult cicada killers feed on nectar. The female stocks her underground nest with cicadas so that the eggs and larvae can feed. Although cicada killers are curious and may follow people around, they usually do not sting unless you try to catch them.

If not you, who? Small thing.

◆ **Never put an insecticide on a flower.** Flowers depend on bees for pollination and bees depend on flowers for food. Insects that are attracted to flowers are usually not the same ones that cause undesirable effects in your yard or garden.

If not you, who? Big thing.

◆ **Plant a bee garden.** A contributing factor to native bee decline is the loss of suitable flowers for food. A mixture of native plants that bloom throughout the summer, like boneset, goldenrod and hibiscus, provide a reliable source of pollen and nectar. Include bee boxes and some areas of bare ground to provide nesting places and shelter in winter.



Care, Educate, Inspire

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