

Creating a Bee Friendly Garden

Bees play an essential role in the pollination of most nuts, fruit, grains and vegetables. In their daily search for nectar and pollen, bees move between flowers, pollinating them. Their bodies have evolved for this task, an incidental one it might seem, but one which benefits the bees as well as the plants. Plant reproduction provides for the continuation of plant species and this in turn provides future food sources for the bees.

In our garden we have both European honey bees and native bees. There are over 4000 species of native bees, which have evolved to pollinate Australian plants. Amagilla, Native Blue Banded bees (the native bumble bee which could have orange or green bands) and the native social bees (Trigona) are also able to pollinate a wide variety of introduced crops and flowers, such as tomatoes, kiwi fruit, blueberries, cranberries, water melons, lychees, mangoes and chilli peppers. European honey bees have adapted to their new home and find nectar and pollen in the flowers of many native plants. An even greater adaptation of introduced bees, which has occurred since the time of colonisation, has been the evolution of a dark honey bee unique to Australia, *Apis mellifera mellifera*. It has the capacity to feed off a greater diversity of eucalyptus trees. They prefer mauve over any other colour,



Think of the bees as precious guests and create a welcome for them. Consider their needs – water, food, protection from poisons and pesticides and shelter from wind and rain.

Bees need non-stagnant water. They congregate for a drink every time we water our plants and create little puddles and damp earth. Pebbles, marbles or stones in a shallow bowl or birdbath placed in a shaded area will provide a great drinking spot for bees.



Plan your garden so that there will be at least four species flowering at any time throughout the year. Create groups of multi-layered plants – an absolute smorgasbord so that foraging bees are rewarded with both variety and quantity. Bees are attracted to plants that have blue, purple, mauve and yellow tones. They love lavender, catmint, borage, mint, nasturtiums, salvias, basil, sage, rocket, chives, calendulas, comfrey, ageratum and coriander. Late winter and spring are crucial times for nourishment so consider rosemary, westringia, wallflowers, some eucalypts, wattles, violas and pansies. Sweet Burseria is a lovely native that flowers profusely in summer. *Leptospermum* species, such as 'polygafolium' and 'whitei', flower in spring and early summer and produce nectar which results in high probiotic activity in the maturing honey.

Limiting or eliminating the use of insecticides in your garden can prevent accidental poisoning of bees. Even low doses can disrupt navigation or be taken back to the nest where they can affect other bees and developing larvae, as well as ending up in the honey. Leave some areas of your garden uncultivated so that burrowing native bees and wasps and ones that nest in hollows and gaps have a sheltered place to call home.

We have a bee friendly nursery and grow and sell many of the plants that help to create a bee friendly garden. Caring for our visiting bees has ensured that we have excellent pollination of our fruit and vegetables. Best of all is bee spotting, looking for different species, remembering that bees have four wings (with the front and rear wings hooked together for flying and unhooked for folding) and sip nectar, while flies have two wings and wasps are carnivores and eat smaller insects.

Happy gardening,
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