



Andy's Garden

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Bees



Common Questions and Answers about Bees.

Q. Why would I want to attract bees?

A. Pollination Power! Bees are important to the pollination process for many plants and flowers. Without pollination, fruits, vegetables and flowers would fail to prosper. Imagine a world without fruits, vegetables and flowers!

Q. I'm afraid of bees! They sting! Is that a misconception?

A. Some bees, such as honeybees and yellow jackets, will sting aggressively if disturbed. But orchard mason bees and bumblebees are docile and peaceful. Orchard mason bees do not sting unless pinched and the sting is similar to a mosquito bite. Bumblebees will sting only if their nest is disturbed. While they are foraging they can actually be petted. Orchard mason bees and bumblebees are two of nature's best pollinators and can be safely welcomed into your backyard.

Q. I have never heard of an orchard mason bee. Are they common?

A. Orchard mason bees are in all 50 states and are one of our most common bees. They are smaller and darker than honeybees. They are a solitary bee and do not swarm. When they encounter humans, they often become still and thus go unnoticed. Orchard mason bees are 75% more effective pollinators than honeybees. It only takes three or four female orchard mason bees to pollinate a full size apple tree - a task that would require a few hundred honeybees! They are easy to raise.

Q. When are orchard mason bees active?

A. They are early spring pollinators, so they are particularly beneficial for fruit trees and early blooming flowers. After mid-summer, you will see very few orchard mason bees as they are already beginning next year's breeding cycle.

Q. When are bumblebees active?

A. Bumblebees forage from early spring to early fall for long hours, and unlike many other bees, are hardy enough to forage in cold, cloudy and windy weather. They are equipped with long tongues that allow them to reach the nectarines of deep blossoms. Some flowers, such as blueberry, pepper and tomato, release their pollen only when buzz-pollinated, which requires the bumblebees to vibrate the blossom.

Q. I hear a lot in the news about honeybees being in trouble. What is this about?

A. Approximately 70% of honeybee populations may be in serious trouble due to a combination of hard winters, dry summers, and parasitic mites. In some states, up to 95% of the hives were lost in 1996. Wild populations of honeybees are in serious decline and those are the bees that most backyard gardeners depend on. Orchard mason bees and bumblebees were not as affected by these problems and are more easily managed by backyard gardeners.

Q. How do I raise these bees?

A. Both bumblebees and orchard mason bees will live in artificial nesting cavities. Orchard mason bees will over-winter as adults in a wood block with tubular holes and lay their eggs in the tubes in the spring. Bumblebees queens will nest in houses placed close to the ground.



*Information provided by:
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one flower at a time.*