



HELP HEAD OFF A DIE-OFF



# KEEPING BEEES ABUZZ

Attract wild bees to your garden

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**A**LBERT EINSTEIN is often attributed with saying, "Humans would follow within four years if bees became extinct."

While it's not been proven that Einstein made this doomsday statement on man's extinction, some types of bees are disappearing in record numbers.

Large-scale, commercial beekeeping operations are reporting colony collapse disorder, a disturbing phenomenon where honeybees just disappear from the hives with no warning or apparent provocation.

Studies are linking the syndrome with pesticide use, certain diseases, poor nutrition and drought, among other causes. This isn't the first

time this has happened to the bee population, but it's the most documented and studied die-off to date.

Colony collapse disorder affects commercial, migrant beekeepers and the farmers who hire them to bring honeybees to pollinate their crops, much like they hire migrant workers to plant and harvest.

What can the average gardener do to promote a healthy wild bee population at home?

According to Matthew Shepherd, pollinator conservation program director for the Portland, Ore.-based Xerces Society, home gardeners can help the plight of the bumblebees by following the tips listed below.

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## Tips on promoting a wild bee population

■ **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.

■ **Use local native plants.** Research suggests native plants are four times more attractive to native bees than exotic flowers. They are also usually well adapted to your growing conditions and can thrive with minimum attention. In gardens, heirloom varieties of herbs and perennials can also provide good foraging.

■ **Choose 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.

■ **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 4 feet or more in diameter.

■ **Include flowers of different shapes.** There are 4,000 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.

■ **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 flow-

ering through spring, summer and fall, you can support a range of bee species that fly at different times of the season.

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

**Native plants to consider:** Aster, black-eyed Susan, caltrop, currant, elder, goldenrod, huckleberry, joe-pye weed, lupine, purple coneflower, rhododendron, sage, stonecrop, sunflower, wild buckwheat, wild lilac and willow.

**Nonnatives that attract bees include:** Basil, cotoneaster, English lavender, giant hyssop, globe thistle, hyssop, marjoram, rosemary, wallflower and zinnia.

## Plants bees like

### GOLDENROD

Butterflies, like bees, enjoy the nectar from goldenrod. Unfairly blamed for causing hay fever in humans, goldenrod's pollen is too heavy and sticky to be blown far from the flowers and is mainly pollinated by insects.



### SUNFLOWER

Common sunflowers are colorful, easy to grow, and another perfect plant for wild bees.



### GLOBE THISTLE

Blue Globe Thistle blooms in July and August and attracts bees, hummingbirds and butterflies.



### STONECROP

Stonecrop works well in a sunny rock garden — and bees love the delicate blooms.



### ASTERS

Typically blooming in the fall, all species of asters are popular with bees and with gardeners for their attractive and colorful flowers. Asters can grow in all hardiness zones.



### COTONEASTER

These cotoneaster blooms provide much-needed nourishment for wild bees. The shrub produces berries popular with birds in the fall.



### JOE-PYE WEED

Planting native plants, such as this joe-pye weed, is beneficial to the health of bees in the home garden.



### RHODODENDRON

West Virginia's state flower is bee-friendly. "Rhododendron catawbiense" grows wild in the Appalachian Mountains.



### SAGE

Humans and bees alike love the taste of sage, a culinary herb. It's a member of the largest genus of plants in the mint family, "Salvia."



**INSIDE:** Buzzing bees don't just intimidate people — caterpillars are scared of them, too **8F**

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