

# Attracting Bees to Your Garden



By Diane Dovholuk, The Swarm Catcher

I watched in awe as the fat little bee with the tiny face came closer. It flew from side to side and up and down, all the while, getting closer and closer. This curious little creature, I believe was enjoying a social visit with me.

\*file32065r\*So starts my interest in bees. The role of native and non-native bees in our gardens is an important one. One third of our diet is dependent on plant pollination. Have you ever had fruit trees with little or no fruit or maybe squash plants that do not produce? Pollination could have been your problem. Bee populations are declining at rapid rates due to diseases, chemical use and loss of habitat. Creating an urban bee garden is a fun way to provide habitat for

pollinators. UC Berkeley student, Mary Schindler spoke at our garden club years ago and said that California native plants are at least four times more likely to attract native bees than exotic plants. Planting flowering plants in large groups (1.5m x 1.5m) is a sure way to bring bees into the garden. Plant flowers that will bloom successively. If you want diversity, let your plantings be diverse! Start an herb garden. Bees and people frequent them. Leave small, unmanicured areas around your landscape. Many native bees make their nests in the ground or in trees. Provide a water source for the bees. This can be anything from a container of rocks and water to a pond. Create windbreaks for those windy days.

Leaf-cutter bees are important for pollinating early fruit so do tolerate some leaf damage. Honeybees go for blue and white flowers, but if necessary, will frequent other flowers. Native bees have co-evolved with native plants so be sure to use them in your yard. Here is a small list of flowers to plant in your garden to attract bees. Observation is key to finding out what flowers work best in your area. Asters, Borago, Composite and Umbelliferae families, Echium, Erigeron, Lavendula spp., Nepeta. Small shrubs, such as Ceanothus, Escallonia, Ilex, Malus, Perovskia, Spirea, Fruit trees. Let some of your vegetables, such as, onions, carrots and brassica go to flower. Weeds have flowers too! Clovers, cranesbill, flax, forget-me-nots, valerian and daisies are good choices too.

So leave wild areas in your yard. Provide a water source. Plant large groupings of the same flowers. Plant native flowering plants. Try to provide a windbreak if you are in a windy area. Keep your gardens free of pesticides and herbicides for the health of the bees and you. Observe what plants work well for the bees in your area and enjoy the fruits of your labor and the bees.

UC Berkeley has a website for learning more about native bees (<http://nature.berkeley.edu/urbanbeegardens/>). There is the Alameda, Mount Diablo([www.diablobees.org/index.html](http://www.diablobees.org/index.html)) and San Francisco Beekeepers Assn. to learn more about honeybees. There are also free Bay-Friendly gardening classes to teach gardening techniques without the use of chemicals.