

Grow A Bee-Friendly Garden

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Dec. 8, 2018

Q: I have been reading about the loss of bee habitat and would like to do something to encourage bees to come to my garden. Do you have any suggestions on how to do this?

A: I'm so glad you are thinking of what changes you can make to your garden to make it more bee-friendly. When we think of bees, we usually think of the honey bee, as this is the most well-known of the bees. However, there are a lot of important native bee species.



Bee (Photo: Jessica Skropanic)

The University of California has recognized that the loss of native bee habitat is one of the greatest threats to our native pollinators and this in turn threatens native plant species and the animals that depend on those plants for food. Urban gardeners can really help native bee populations by creating habitat for them. According to the UC Berkeley Bee Lab a quarter of the 1,600 native bee species found in California have been found living in urban landscapes.

Here are a few suggestions for creating a bee oasis from the California Bee-Friendly Garden Recipes publication.

1. Start by planting at least 20 different plants that provide both pollen and nectar for visiting bees.
2. When planting the garden include annuals in the mix and try for overlapping bloom times for every month between February and October.
Most bee species exhibit floral constancy, which means they visit only one or two types of flowers each time they forage. To accommodate this bee habit, use repetitive plantings so you have several plants of the same species in your garden.
In the California Bee-Friendly Garden Recipes publication there are “garden recipes” with lists of plants for an extended bloom season and the quality of bee food they provide. Many of these plants also appeal to honey bees so you should be able to provide food for both native and European bee species.
3. Make sure to maintain the blooms in the garden by deadheading flowers, providing consistent irrigation of plants and fertilizing when needed. Plants need to be healthy in order to maintain a long bloom season.
4. Do not use pesticides as this will kill off bees. Keep some of the garden area clear of mulch for ground nesting bees. Most native bees are gentle, not aggressive like hornets so you don't need to be concerned that you'll be creating a hazard by inviting ground-nesting bees to your garden.

For more information check out the University of California publications “Bee-Friendly Garden Recipes ANR Publication 8518,” and “How to attract and Maintain Pollinators in Your Garden ANR Publication 8498.” These are available at <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/>.

Next time you're in Davis, visit the [Haagen-Dazs Honey Bee Haven at U.C. Davis](https://beegarden.ucdavis.edu/) at <https://beegarden.ucdavis.edu/>. This is a unique outdoor museum where visitors can observe and learn about bees and the plants that support them. This garden is open daily from dawn to dusk for self-guided tours.

Another way you can learn how to encourage bees to your garden, or sponsor a bee hive, is to visit the [Honey Bee Conservancy](https://thehoneybeeconservancy.org/plant-a-bee-garden/)'s website at <https://thehoneybeeconservancy.org/plant-a-bee-garden/>

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.