

Attract Ohio Bees to your Yard



Native Bumblebee on Marsh or Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) Photo by Tom Sheley

Many readers have e-mailed me about bees disappearing “What can we do to help?” many ask. Add beautiful plants to your garden for bees!

My yard has become a bed and breakfast for friendly, hard-working native bees because of the native plants that thrive in it. Our small city gardens could be the key to saving bees according to the BBC www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-14309007.

For a bee plant list, put your zip code in the Pollinator Coalition guide at www.pollinator.org/guides.htm.

“I’m afraid of bees because I was stung,” stated my girlfriend. “It was probably a wasp or hornet, but a bee got the blame,” I replied. “Wasps and hornet are aggressive, but native bees primarily sting in self defense. Last summer, a large carpenter bee accidentally flew into me, and it didn’t sting me. Male carpenter bees are incapable of stinging, and females sting only if extremely provoked.” “Really, I’m surprised.” Later she mentioned, “I’m not afraid of bees anymore.”

Unlike hornets, wasps, and the European honey bee, the more than 3,000 species of native bees are solitary. They nest singly in the ground or woody places and do not protect a hive. Only the bumble bee has a hive, and only the female stings to protect it. Carpenter bees buzz loudly not to threaten you, but are “whistling” while they work. The buzzing sound is caused by the wings beating as fast as 230 beats per second!

“There are holes in my deck from carpenter bees,” a volunteer mentioned last fall (carpenters are the only bees that can drill into wood). “If it is truly a problem, try painting the wood with polyurethane instead of stain in early spring, before bees lay their eggs,” I replied. She called me this summer happily shouting, “It worked!”

“My parents raised me that my yard should be perfect, so why aren’t my plants as healthy or pretty as yours?” my neighbor asked me. (She waters, replaces, sprays and fertilizes plants, while I sit on my front porch enjoying the yard.) “Pollination helps your blooms, fruits, veggies and berries from being deformed or damaged,” I answered. “I don’t use insecticides, and natural predators eat insects that damage plants. My insect damage is virtually unnoticeable.”

Almost all bee kills (99.5%) occur when bees pick up pesticides while pollinating plants. Pesticides don’t kill just bees; they kill nearly all insects that 96% of the birds eat. Even some organic pesticides, including herbicides and fungicides, are toxic to bees. See page 2 in the Xerces Factsheet table www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/xerces-organic-approved-pesticides-factsheet.pdf.

Birds eat insects, especially caterpillars. Insects (including caterpillars) rely on plants. Plants rely on bees. We rely on bees for one out of three bites of food, including fruits and vegetables. Bee-pollinated plants are used to make medicine, chocolate, vanilla, peppermint, coffee and wine. “If you didn’t have caterpillars, you can kiss the birds goodbye,” said Jim McCormac in the 7/31/11 Columbus Dispatch. I’ll add, if you didn’t have native bees to pollinate plants, you can kiss the caterpillars goodbye.

Lessons learned? If you’re interested, email marc-a@columbus.rr.com with questions or to receive the monthly ‘Nature Scoop’ email. Go to www.backyardhabitat.info to learn more and see videos of the bees in my yard. Let’s work together to help bees, one yard at a time.