

Creating a Wild Bee Garden - Introduction



Mix of pollen- and nectar-rich annuals and perennials that bloom in succession from spring through fall. Photo by Celeste Ets-Hokin.

From the first bumble bee queens waking from hibernation in early spring, to the last long-horns still weighed down by pollen leg-warmers in late summer, much is asked of our nesting female native bees to ensure the survival of the next generation. To meet these challenges, our fearless females need a continuous supply of pollen and nectar from spring through fall, both as nourishment for themselves and to provide food stores for their offspring. And with their demanding foraging schedules, female bees must find places to nest within reasonable flight distance of these floral resources.

For the 4000 or so species of North America's native bees, these basics are becoming increasingly difficult to find. As the natural areas where native bees once thrived have been steadily lost to development and industrial farming, the availability of vital forage and nesting habitat has plummeted in recent decades. Such habitat loss has taken a corresponding toll on native bee populations nationwide, driving some species, including a number of bumble bees, to extinction.



In recent decades, development has increasingly replaced or disrupted vital pollinator habitat. Photo courtesy of the Xerces Society.

But as we are continuing to discover, our residential gardens can play an important role in the conservation of North America's native bees. Urban and suburban landscapes can offer valuable habitat oases, and even corridors, for many species of native bees that might otherwise be threatened. These resourceful pollinators are in fact always on the look-out for urban real estate, and when you build it they will come!



Butterfly visiting residential bee garden. Photo by Celeste Ets-Hokin.

By following just a few bee-friendly gardening practices, you can transform your front and back yards into a haven for pollinators (Yes, those flashy, over-dressed butterflies are frequent visitors to all the best bee gardens.). And keep in mind that while saving our native bees, “one garden at a time”, is a great beginning, a collective effort among neighbors can be that much more effective. By working together, we can blanket our residential landscapes with a BEE-UTIFUL patchwork quilt of bee gardens.



Residential bee garden with lavender and gaillardia. Photo by Matthew Shepherd, The Xerces Society.