

How to Build a Pollinator-Friendly Garden (10 Tips to Attract Bees)

Bees are in trouble, besties. In the last few decades, bee populations have been declining at an alarming rate. Scientists have identified several factors contributing to the decline, including habitat destruction, pesticide overuse and dependency, and climate change.

One thing is for sure: we need bees! They play a crucial role in our food system, pollinating crops that provide us with everything from fruits and vegetables to nuts and flowers.

How can you help? One tangible way to help the bees is to create a pollinator-friendly garden. A pollinator-friendly garden provides bees (and other pollinators) with everything they need to thrive: pollen, nectar, water, and shelter.

Let's talk about the reasons to build a bee-friendly garden and how you can get started on a pollinator-friendly paradise in your backyard.

Benefits of having a pollinator-friendly garden

If you're here, you likely already know about current issues affecting the bees. You know bees are important, and [they're dying at alarming rates](#). Even so, I want to make a quick argument for why you should consider putting in a pollinator garden to help your local bee population.

We depend on pollinators, like bees, for our food supply

Did you know that one in three bites of food we eat depends on bees and other pollinators? Bees pollinate a significant portion of our food - [around 35%](#). From fruits and vegetables to nuts and oils, bees play a vital role in producing many of our most important food sources. Without bees, our agricultural system would be unable to support our growing population.

Beyond their impact on the food we eat, bees also contribute to the health of ecosystems and overall biodiversity. For example, their pollination helps ensure genetic diversity among plants, and their presence can indicate the overall health of an environment.

Humans wouldn't be able to support our population without bees

If this sounds alarming to you, that's because it definitely is! We've gotten to the point where it's crucial to take the declining bee population seriously and take any action to help them.

We want to keep bees around for our survival and the survival of most plants and animals on Earth. It doesn't get more real than that!

What is a pollinator-friendly garden, and how can I create one?

We've talked about the why; let's jump right into the how. Here's some of my best tips for creating a pollinator garden that will attract bees, nourish them, and bring some life back into your neighborhood.

1.) Choose plants that flower at different times of the year so there is always something blooming for the bees.

Bees have a harder time finding food than they did fifty years ago. We can help our buzzing friends by selecting plants that flower at different times of the year. That way, there will always be something in bloom for them to pollinate.

Not only does this benefit the bees, but it also creates an ever-changing and dynamic garden for us to enjoy. Think about how you can support these important little insects by creating a diverse flowering schedule in your garden. This is one of your best opportunities to create a space that will actually be useful to your local bee population, so choose your plants with care.

2.) Include various plant types—flowers, shrubs, trees, herbs—to provide a variety of pollen and nectar sources.

Planning your garden or yard with pollinators in mind can tremendously impact your local ecosystem's overall health and diversity. By including various plant types, you can provide pollinators with a steady supply of pollen and nectar throughout the growing season.

Flowering trees are a major food source for pollinators in the springtime, while herbs and smaller flowers provide valuable resources during summer and fall. In addition to supporting local pollinator populations, planting a diverse array of plants creates an aesthetically pleasing yard or garden space with year-round visual interest.

3.) Select flowering plants and native plants marked as pollinator-friendly.

Flowers like lavender, lupine, and cosmos add beauty to your garden and offer a rich food source for bees and other pollinators. There are hundreds of [bee-friendly plants](#) to choose from, so look for some options that grow well in your gardening zone.

Here are some common pollinator-friendly plants for your garden:

- **Flowering herbs** like oregano, chives, basil, and thyme.
- **Annual flowers** like zinnias, cosmos, bachelor buttons, nasturtium, and marigolds.
- **Perennial plants** and flowers like echinacea, honeysuckle, clematis, viola, crocus, and daisies.
- **Squash and cucurbit family plants** like zucchini, pumpkins, yellow squash, and cucumbers. (If you've grown squash before, you've probably seen bees all over those flowers, even taking naps inside them.)

And don't forget about native plants! These plants have evolved alongside local pollinators and can provide an even more abundant food source. Plus, when you include native plants in your landscape, you're helping to support the ecosystem's overall health.

4.) Place plants in clusters rather than singly so the bees can more easily find them.

Say goodbye to those lonely single plantings and hello to clusters. Placing plants in groups isn't just aesthetically pleasing; it also helps bees easily find their way from bloom to bloom.

Clustered plants of similar varieties can help promote pollination and create bigger and better blooms. So go ahead, shake things up and make your garden a buzz-worthy destination for those busy bees.

Bonus tip: Choose flowers with single layers of petals for even easier access for busy bees. Happy clustering!

5.) Avoid pesticides and herbicides

Choosing to forego pesticides and herbicides can make all the difference for bees, as these chemicals can weaken their immune systems and even kill them. Next time you're reaching for that spray to eliminate a pesky weed or insect, consider using more natural practices like hand-pulling or homemade pest solutions.

Common garden pests, like aphids, can be sprayed off with water. If you need to use a pesticide, look for organic options targeting the pests you're dealing with.

6.) Avoid monoculture

Have you ever seen a field or garden filled with only one type of plant? This is an example of monoculture, and although it may appear tidy and controlled, it can actually harm pollinator health. When bees can only access a few plant species, their immune health suffers. They aren't able to take up nutrients from a variety of plants and flowers, and as a result, they're [more susceptible to illness](#).

In contrast, interplanting, intercropping, and permaculture all involve growing different types of plants in close proximity. These diverse gardens provide more food options for pollinators like bees and offer various flower shapes and sizes for them to gather nectar and pollen.

Embrace crop diversity. Plant some herbs alongside your tomatoes. Surround your green bean bed with annual flowers. Avoid planting only one or two species in a garden bed unless that plant species is known to do best on its own (fennel, for example.)

Incorporating various plants also [helps improve the overall health and resilience](#) of the garden by adding nutrients to the soil and attracting natural pest control. Gardens with more diversity tend to have fewer issues with pests and require fewer pesticides and sprays.

And yes - clustering bunches of the same plant together is still a good idea. You just want to make sure that you're embracing crop diversity in the garden.

7.) Provide water for the bees

Have you ever noticed that your garden seems particularly buzzing with activity after a rain shower? That's because water is essential for all living creatures, including bees.

Make sure to include a water source in your pollinator-friendly garden to help the bees thrive, especially as the summers become hotter.

- Fill a shallow dish or birdbath with water and add some stones for the bees to land on while they drink.
- Create a bee watering hole by burying a pot upside down in the ground, filling it with water, and placing stones on top for easy access. Change out the water often (daily or twice on hot days) for the best results.

Providing easily accessible water will not only help attract more bees to your garden but will also support their overall health and vitality.

8.) Include some sheltered areas in your garden where bees can take refuge from wind and rain.

Sheltered areas are especially important for bees when they're less active during the cooler months. By including some sheltered places in your pollinator garden, you can help them survive the winter and be ready to pollinate come springtime!

A pile of rocks or a stack of wooden boards will do the trick, but use whatever you have on hand. Or, [follow this tutorial](#) and use some dried-out stems or reeds to create a makeshift bee habitat.

9.) Embrace low and no-till gardening methods

No-till gardening methods not only make your life easier, but they can also positively impact your local pollinator populations. These techniques involve leaving the soil undisturbed and allowing nature to do its job.

This means less tilling and digging, disrupting underground habitats and damaging delicate root systems. It allows for limited disturbance of soil life, leading to healthier soil and stronger plants with deeper roots. [There's a lot of science behind no-till gardening](#) and not tilling the soil.

And when you leave some areas of your garden untouched or "untidy," it provides crucial habitat and food sources for pollinators like bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

10.) Start small if you can't go all out yet.

Some blooms are better than none. You're in the majority if you can't do everything on this list in one season. But you might be wondering, where do I even start with building a bee-friendly garden if I'm on a budget?

My suggestion is to start small and work your way up. Maybe adding some colorful flowers or grabbing a few seed packets at the store is all you can handle right now. But that's okay! That can still make a huge difference for those tiny buzzing pollinators in your area.

And who knows, maybe next year you'll decide to add some trees and shrubs to the mix. Every little bit counts when it comes to helping the bees and creating a vibrant, buzzing garden full of life

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Wrapping up

There's more I could say about building a pollinator garden, but for the sake of brevity, we'll wrap it up here for now. Do you have plans to develop a garden for the bees in your yard? I'd love to hear about it in the comments!