

Heather Holm's Top Gardening Activities to Support Native Bees

Heather Holm, a pollinator conservationist, and award-winning author, offers these important tips for residential gardeners to support our native bees.

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One of the pollinator books by author Heather Holm, *Bees An Identification and Native Plant Forage Guide*

During a recent interview, I asked Heather Holm for the top four or five activities she considers most important for gardeners to support our native bees. Here are her suggestions, purposely condensed. More detailed information can [be found on Ms. Holm's website](https://www.pollinatorsnativeplants.com/) (<https://www.pollinatorsnativeplants.com/>) and her award-winning books.

Feed the Bees

- Provide a diversity of native plants.
- Keep the flower restaurant open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, throughout the growing season. Strive to have layers of native plants – perennials, shrubs, and trees - blooming from early spring through late autumn.
- Consider your garden an open buffet table for pollinators whose primary diet is pollen and nectar.
- Spring and fall are the most critical times for our native bees. Trees and shrubs are essential for a supply of early nectar and pollen.

House the Bees

- Allow some open ground for the ground-nesting bees. Undisturbed nesting sites provide a habitat for our native bees. Each species has its preferred soil type, usually well-drained.
- Ground-nesting bees are solitary and not aggressive. However, ground-nesting social yellowjacket wasps have an underground

colony of papery combs and may be aggressive when disturbed.

- Trim pithy or hollow plant stems to knee height and leave them standing. The bees will use the stubble of the previous season's stems for a nesting cavity. The current season's new growth will hide the old stems.
- Provide soft wood with beetle holes, both old logs on the ground and in trees.
- Avoid commercial housing for tube-nesting bees as it often is not deep enough to protect the next generation of bees from predators. Generally, stem-nesting bees do not occur in such proximity to each other in nature. These densities may also allow for the transmission of disease.

Protect the Bees

- While the restaurant must be open 24/7, it must not include poisons! A residential landscape **rarely** needs pesticides.
- Do your best to be chemical-free.
- Address specific issues through cultural methods rather than using pesticides for cosmetic or maintenance reasons.
- Be wary of campaigns that do more harm than good to bee populations. For example, the "No-mow May" concept can damage lawns and promote the growth of unwanted weedy, and invasive plants.

Celebrate the Bees

- Provide signage to educate others, especially with lawn conversion areas.
- Consider creating a habitat under the dripline of trees where a lawn is often difficult to maintain.
- Help with bee initiatives.
- Talk about pollinators and native plants to others, to everyone.

Learn About the Bees

- Discover that many of our native bee species are specialists in collecting pollen from specific plants.
- Keep your eyes open! Be aware of the seasonality of our native bees. While the entire life cycle may take a year, the adults may be active for only a few weeks.
- Observe and photograph the bees.
- Consider [using the iNaturalist app](https://www.inaturalist.org/)(https://www.inaturalist.org/).
- [Participate in Bumble Bee Watch](https://www.bumblebeewatch.org/)(https://www.bumblebeewatch.org/) or similar activities.

There is so much to learn about our gentle native bees. They are among the best pollinators on our planet!

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