

# How to help bees and other pollinators

by Simon Briault

The story on pages 6 & 7 of this issue tells us what pollen is and how important it is in growing the plants we eat. Pollinators like bees and butterflies need to be able to find food and safe places to build their nests. So how can you help them where you live? What kinds of plants and flowers do they like, and where should you plant them? Here are five top tips:

## 1. Plant many different plants and shrubs

Bees love lavender and other plants in the mint family such as bee balm and salvia, and many herbs that we too enjoy - rosemary, basil, oregano, sage and marjoram to name a few. Clover is another favourite.

Plan to have trees and flowers (native species if possible) that bloom at different times all through the season from March to October. In this way pollinators can always find food when they need it. For the colder months, winter heather is an excellent source of food for bees, depending on where you live in B.C. Talk to somebody at your local garden centre to find out what to plant and when.

## 2. No back yard? No problem.

You don't have to have a back yard to grow plants and flowers that pollinators will love. You can scatter seeds of nectar-bearing plants along the boulevards and the edges of alleys to provide safe routes from one good feeding location to the next.

Try planting fruit trees, shrubs and herbs in pots on your balcony, your back deck or your roof garden. Even a window box will do. And why not see if there's a community garden near you that you can turn into a bee paradise in the summer months?

## 3. Don't pull all your weeds

Weeds and wild flowers are great for bees and other pollinators so don't pull them all. Those big, golden dandelions that people hate coming up in their lawns? Bees love them. Ask if you can leave at least a few of them to grow.

Many small solitary bees live in the soil just under the surface. If you do have to do some weeding, pull the weeds out carefully but do not dig over the soil because you could damage the bees' nests.

## 4. Something to drink?

Just like people, bees and insects like to drink as well as eat. Plant kale, cabbage and Brussels sprouts in your vegetable garden. These plants gather shallow pools of water in their leaves. Can you spot a thirsty bee or butterfly coming by for a visit?

## 5. Avoid pesticides and fertilizers

It's very important **not** to use artificial pesticides and fertilizers. Bees in particular are very sensitive to the toxins they contain. Garden stores usually offer natural options such as ladybugs and parasitic worms as well as organic fertilizers for the soil. Be sure to protect and conserve spiders because they work tirelessly to keep pests in check.

## What to do if you get stung by a bee

There are more than 450 different kinds of bees in B.C. Most of them are not able to sting you at all. Just watch bees and let them get on with their work. It's only if they feel like you're threatening their nest or if you are unlucky enough to sit on one that you might get stung. If this happens, TELL AN ADULT RIGHT AWAY.



Photo credits: Himalyan Blackberry with a Tri-coloured Bumble Bee, Brown-belted Bumble Bee male feeding on nectar, Clodius Parnassian female: Rob Alexander, B.C. • Wild Strawberry, Paintbrush: David Shackleton, B.C. • Bee illustration: loradoraa, istock

