

Protecting our Pollinators

Pollinators are essential for many of our food crops to produce fruits, vegetables and seeds. They also play a vital role in producing food for birds and other wildlife. Pollinators and plants have coevolved to ensure the transfer of genetic material (pollen) from one flower to the next. There are many different pollinators, including birds, bats, butterflies, beetles and bees.

One-third of the plants that provide us with food are pollinated by bees. Although honey bees are often associated with pollination they are not necessarily the most efficient or best pollinators.



Mason bees are native to the West Coast and are very efficient pollinators. They are now being used in fruit orchards because they are known to have a high pollination rate, producing substantially more fruit. They are solitary bees and because they are not native to Alberta require some assistance for overwintering. There is minimal equipment required, they are not aggressive and have the same environmental requirements as our native bees.

In Alberta, at least 200 native bees (including over 20 **bumblebees**) have been identified. These bees have evolved along with our native plants; they do not require specialized equipment or management. They are mostly solitary bees and make their homes in the soil, in rock crevices, hollow stems of shrubs.



No matter what types of bees they are, it is important we protect them and provide a welcoming environment. To this end, there are things we can do to support and encourage bees in our environment:

- Avoid using pesticides – they will kill not only harmful insects, but beneficial insects including bees.
- Choose flowers with high pollen and nectar content.
- Plant fruit trees and shrubs - they provide large numbers of blossoms in close proximity, which make it easier for bees to collect nectar and pollen.
- Similarly, plant flowers in clusters or waves.
- Plant for a succession of flowers from early spring into fall.
- Plant native flowers.
- Plant flowers which are white, yellow, blue or purple – bees do not see the colour red.
- Provide a source of water - should be shallow as bees can drown in deeper water.

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