



Bees in the Garden

Bees are the workhorses of the garden. Bees are the pollinators that ensure we can grow most of the fruits, vegetables, and flowers that we enjoy. The number of bees is shrinking and there is concern that our food supply will be affected. There are over 20,000 species of bees. Having some knowledge about bees and their habits, allows one to be around bees without getting stung. Some bees are social and some bees are solitary.

Honey bees are social. They live in large groups in hives with many thousands of other bees. The female bees are the worker bees and the only bees that can sting. Honey bees are intent on keeping their hives clean and gathering pollen and nectar from various flowers and bringing it back to the hive as food for the next generation of bees. In their search for pollen and nectar they carry the pollen from one flower to another on the tiny hairs on their body which results in pollination of the plants. Honey bees are very busy and are intent on their job. They are getting food for the hive NOT looking for ways to sting a person. Honey bees can sting only once and then they die. We enjoy the bi-products of their labor: honey and honey combs.

Native bees are solitary bees. Good examples of natives bees are Mason bees, Bumble bees and Carpenter bees. Solitary bees live alone or in small clusters in the ground, old wood, brush, boxes, open ends of metal pipes, etc. Bumble bees generally build their nests in the ground. Each bee builds their own nest and collects pollen and nectar for their own young. Native bees are very beneficial because they pollinate many plants that honey bees don't like. They are great pollinators.

Bees only become aggressive when a person or animal gets too close to their nests or the bee feels cornered. To avoid getting stung stay away from bee nests. Check the area before working in it. Listen for BUZZing and walk slowly away. If a bee bumps you, move away in a zig / zag pattern. You are in the flight path of the honey bee going back and forth from hive to their plant source. If a bee lands on you, stand still, and let it fly away on its own. Don't swat bees or flail your hands and arms - it will only make the bee more aggressive. You are being threatening.

If you want to help bees, plant flowers that attract bees. Likewise, if you are trying to get rid of bees don't plant flowers that will attract them. Different species of bees are attracted to different plants. Some of the best flowering plants for Palo Pinto and Parker Counties are: Artemisia, Fall Aster, Black-eyed Susan, Mums, Four Nerve Daisy, Gregg's Blue Mist, Hibiscus, Penstemon, Shasta Daisy, Autumn Sage, Mexican Bush Sage, Russian Sage, Turk's Cap, Wine Cup, Yarrow, Crepe Myrtle, Hydrangea, Ligustrum, and Hollies. Mainly, it is any plant that blooms for a long time.

Interested in becoming a Master Gardener? Come to an information seminar in August. For more details or call the Agri-Life Extension Office at 940.659.1228