

## PUT THE ACTION INTO SOCIAL ACTION

### GREEN TIP #6: SAVE THE BEES

They may be tiny, but bees, wasps, beetles, butterflies and moths, and a myriad of other invertebrates pollinate 80% of the crops we eat, help plants propagate, and are a food resource for bigger animals such as birds and mammals. Lose the insects, and things get very tricky indeed.

Because of their importance to our food crops, it is more crucial than ever to support these buzzing beauties. Gardens have the potential to be excellent habitats for pollinators: Even the smallest or simplest garden has some sort of invertebrate life, barely discernible to the human eye.

Here are some easy ways to help #savethebees (without going full-on beekeeper).

1. **Go for gold with a variety of blooms.** The flowers you choose are vital in providing food for the likes of bees, beetles and butterflies. While they don't have to be native, take care not to introduce any invasive plants. And most importantly, go for a wide variety from different families, which will in turn attract different insects.



Members of the **daisy family**, the **carrot family**, the **teasel family**, and the **rose family** are all very attractive to bees and hoverflies but also contain lots of different shapes, seedheads and colors to keep things interesting in your garden. Plants in the **mint family** are also beloved by bees.

2. **Avoid flowers inaccessible to insects.** When picking flowering plants, choose ones with single flowers, meaning a single layer of petals. Double-petaled flowers can prevent insects from accessing pollen and nectar, so while they might look amazing, they aren't much use to pollinators.
3. **Don't forget winter-flowering plants.** Honeybees don't hibernate, so they need access to nectar and pollen even during the winter. You could plant **bulbs** such as crocuses or **winter-flowering shrubs** such

as Oregon grape and Japanese quince. No space? Get creative with **window boxes to attract bees** (see below)—try wildflowers or herbs in a sunny, south-facing window box, or violas and *Tiarella* for shady or north-facing windows. Or what about a winter-flowering shrub in a pot by the front door?

4. **Provide shelter with trees, climbers, and ground cover.** Bugs need places to overwinter and hide from predators. Look for species of trees with interesting bark, with lots of gaps in which insects can hide. Shrubs and climbers also create excellent shelter for bugs.

5. **Leave a dish of water out for bees to drink from—with a cork, stone, or twig for them to land on.** Water is an ingredient of "bee bread," a mix of pollen, water, and enzymes that bees store and ferment to feed developing larvae. Adding twigs, moss, or rocks to the water gives the bees something to land on so they're less at risk of falling into the water and drowning. To deter mosquitos, change your water at least once a week.



6. **Let the garden do itself.** Now for the good news: the less you do, the more wildlife will benefit. Bees and other pollinating insects are usually on the wing when plants are flowering, but that doesn't mean they just disappear for the rest of the year—many complete their lifecycles in hollow stems or nests within the soil, or tucked up within the undergrowth.

Your plants might have died back for the winter, but their structures are important places for larvae to overwinter, so leave old stems uncut for as long as possible. Not only does this mean less work but different types of seedheads create a beautiful effect in heavy frost or with the winter sun behind them. If you must cut down the old stems, pile them up in a corner so they're still of use to insects.

7. **Make a bug hotel.** Bug hotels, bog gardens, and compost heaps all provide shelter and nesting sites for insects—and you don't need to spend any money. If you haven't got time to **create your own bug hotel**, put a pile of sticks and leaves in an undisturbed corner, or a bank of soil in a north-facing spot could become home to overwintering solitary bees.



Avoid placing the bee hotel in shade, which might attract unwanted wasps. Have it facing southeast. Bees like to be warm in the morning before heading out to gather pollen. (see Green Tip #3)

8. **Embrace your weeds.** Dandelions are an amazing source of nectar and pollen late winter when nothing else is flowering. You'll see them covered in bees and pollen beetles in early spring, so resist the urge to pull them out or mow them off. Nettles are a food plant for more than 40 butterfly and moth species—if you can leave a patch at the back of the garden, insects will be grateful.

9. **Use natural pest control.** Wildlife in balance helps your garden look after itself. Take your cue from nature: too much of one thing indicates an imbalance somewhere. For example, if you're overrun with aphids, introduce plants that attract predatory insects such as hoverflies and wasps, which in turn will eat your aphids.



If you must spray, look for products that target the thing(s) you want to get rid of, rather than using sprays that kill everything. Many soft-bodied insect pests can be controlled with diluted dish detergent. Birds are very good pest control, so don't forget to keep them coming to your garden.

## GREEN CRAFT:

Think that you can't [help save the bees](#) because you don't have access to a lawn? Think again! You can create a small haven for your local bees and spruce up the view from your window with just a few plants!



## MATERIALS:

- Terracotta pots or a window box
- A bag of potting soil
- Several [bee-friendly plants](#) of your choice (i.e., lavender, thyme, and rosemary).
- One or two small, flat containers
- 1 sheet, tarp or trash bag for your work surface

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Gently remove your first plant from its plastic or cardboard container, leaving the roots intact. Follow with the rest of the plants.
2. Place the plant in a pot (or window box) of your choice. Repeat until all of your chosen flowers or herbs have been arranged.
3. Fill in the sides and top with soil so all the roots are covered and the plants are stable. Pack the soil lightly.
4. Place your potted plant on the windowsill or porch/deck/steps, water lightly, and allow to drain.
5. Place one or two small, shallow containers of water near your flowers so that the bees have a place to re-hydrate. (Pollinating's thirsty work, and bees need a ready supply of clean water to function.)
6. Brew a pot of coffee (a plant which is pollinated by bees ... FYI), sit by your new garden window and ponder the wondrous ease with which you have just helped the environment.



These materials cost about \$30 at Home Depot. But if you want to add some local color to your bee-garden, try shopping at your closest **farmers market** for flowers and herbs from organic growers.