

# Bees need our help

Bees are vital for the pollination of our fruit, crops and flowers and without them we would not have enough to eat! Some plants have even adapted themselves to attract bees to make sure they pollinate and survive. In return bees are provided with a food source from which they make honey to feed themselves and their colonies. In fact, plants and bees rely on each other to survive – and feed us!

Bees have suffered a crash in their population caused by a combination of disease, intensive agriculture and planting of single crop species which limit the areas they can feed on. Changes in our weather patterns also confuse bees when they wake up from hibernation too early or get caught out in summer storms or late frosts which either kill them or the plants on which they feed.

Planting native wildflowers in gardens, parks or simply in containers will all help our bees. They will be rewarded by visiting the plants and feeding – and be too busy collecting their pollen and nectar to sting – unless provoked.



## UK Bees

There are about 270 different species of bees in the UK - some bees form colonies and are highly social animals whilst others are loners and choose to lead a non-social life-style.

### Bumble Bees

There are 14 species of bumble bees which form colonies of up to 200 bees in one nest and are often found below ground in old mice nests for example. They get their name from the apparently bumbling flight when foraging or searching for a nest site which they only use for one year. Come the autumn all but the young bees die, leaving the new Queens to hibernate so there is no need to store honey to see them through the winter.



The bees collect the pollen on their front legs which are moistened with nectar. They then pass it to the pollen brush on the hind leg and finally into a pollen basket on the other hind leg.

### Honey Bees

These are the most social of our bees. Bee-keepers use colonies of honey-bees in special hives to encourage them to collect pollen and nectar to make honey.

The colony is made up of the Queen, the workers (females) and drones (males). Bees collect the nectar using their long tongues like straws. The young bees then make the honey by swallowing nectar and bringing it back up several times until the water is reduced in the nectar and it forms honey. The honey is stored in wax cells in the hive.



Red tailed bumble bee



Leaf cutter bee



## Solitary Bees

These bees generally live alone and are self-sufficient. You are likely to see these bees in your garden or park

### Leaf Cutter Bees

Leaf cutters neatly cut out circular pieces of leaf from living plants (particularly roses) to make their nest cells. They build their nests in burrows of rotting wood such as fence posts and even old park benches!



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### Mason Bees

Often make their nests in walls and are capable of burrowing into the mortar of brickwork of old houses occasionally causing damage. The two-coloured mason bee makes its nest in empty snail shells.

### Miner Bees

These attractive little bees like to make their homes in bare, dry soil that is well drained. Careful scanning of such areas in early summer will reveal their little 'mines' which are the entrances to their nest sites.



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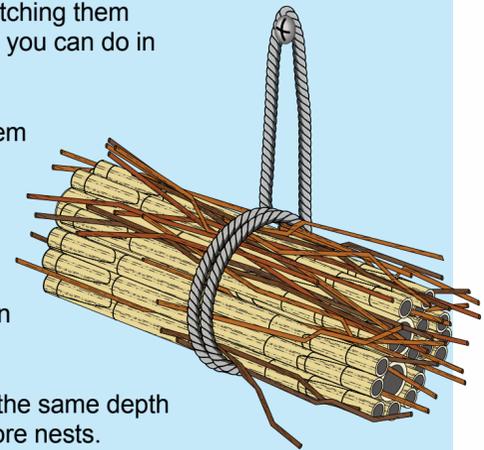
## Helping Bees

If you would like to help bees or simply enjoy watching them go about their business, there are several things you can do in your garden.

- Plant flowers that attract bees to encourage them to collect nectar and pollen such as foxglove, honeysuckle, wallflowers, teasel and sunflower.

- Attract solitary bees by installing a bee post – drill a post approx 1.8m by 15cm (6ft x 6") with lots of holes to 10cm (4") depth and 6 to 10mm in diameter will encourage them to nest.

- Use short canes approx 15cm hollowed out to the same depth and attach to a fence, tree or shed to provide more nests.



## WHAT MAKES A BEE 'BUZZ'

Bees' wings beat between 130 to 240 beats per second! The smaller the bee the faster the beat.

## BEE FACT

Honey bees live together in colonies and make their home in a hive. A colony can contain 50,000 bees but only one Queen. A honey bee colony can produce 60kg of honey each year.

Visit [www.leicester.gov.uk/bees](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/bees) to find out more on how you can help bees in Leicester.



Lavender