

Why Humans Need Bees and How We Can Help Them



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The population of the world was [around](#) 7.3 billion in 2015, and it's expected to reach 9.7 billion in 2050. As our population rises, food production will need to increase as well. If the population breaks 9 billion by 2050, the world food production needs to [rise](#) by 70 percent and developing countries need to double their food production. That feat is difficult to achieve under the best circumstances. Unfortunately, we're not under the best circumstances. One-third of our food comes from plants that depend on [pollination](#) from bees, and those all-important bees are [facing](#) serious population declines due to habitat loss, invasive species, parasites, and pesticides.

Importance of Bees

Pollinators include many insects and animals, such as ants, bats, bees, beetles, birds, butterflies, flies, moths, and wasps. In the United States, the majority of crop pollination is thanks to honeybees. Crops that need pollination include tomatoes, apples, cotton, almonds, grapes, onions, pumpkins, blueberries, and more.

Bees fly from blossom to blossom and gather pollen and nectar for their food. Thanks to their hairy bodies, the pollen sticks to the bees when they land on a flower and is transported to the next flower. While some plants can self-pollinate or rely on wind or water for pollination, many

plants are completely dependent on pollinators. Most flowering plant species only produce seeds if pollinators move pollen from one flower to another.

Protecting the Bees

You can help save pollinators from your own backyard by making pollinator-friendly choices in your yard and garden. Choose native plants, which are more likely to attract pollinators as they have co-evolved together. Also, be sure to choose flowers that bees [prefer](#) and that have a variety of bloom times so bees have food in all seasons. Some options include pansies, peonies, bee balm, borage, and black-eyed Susans.

Avoid using pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides in your yard and garden. These kill all insects, even bees and butterflies, and they can harm plants that bees rely on, such as [dandelions](#), which have been dubbed “the pollinator’s best friend.” Bees also need a nesting place. However, native bees don’t nest in hives; instead, they use bare ground or decaying wood. You can place a pile of tree branches on your property, leave bare patches of sandy soil, or build a native bee house.

You can also help by joining forces with the National Wildlife Foundation (NWF). Join their causes like protecting grasslands (a natural habitat for bees) or join a NWF affiliate in your area. You can also subscribe to their free Garden for Wildlife e-newsletter. Each month the NWF will send expert tips and projects on attracting birds, butterflies, pollinators, and other wildlife.

Tips for Gardening

If you’re a [first-time gardener](#), it’s helpful to have advice on how to get started. To begin, study your property to determine which areas get the most sun and shade. You should also do a soil test to figure out if you need to adjust the pH or supplement nutrients. While you can perform an at-home test, they won’t detect lead, which is critical to know if you’re growing edibles. Send your soil samples to the Lead Safe America Foundation for a free lead test, and grow edibles in raised beds or pots with new soil if the soil tests positive for lead.

There are many different garden styles, so look up the varieties and find one that matches your personal style. Once you’re ready to start, aim for a smaller garden and expand it as your skills improve. Ensure you have the right tools, such as a spade, garden hose, pruner, etc. Also, plant a good mix of perennials and annuals, and opt for plants that have similar sun and water requirements.

Starting a garden with a small space is [achievable](#) too. You can use a raised planter, window boxes, or pots. You can also repurpose items like old shutters to hang from a wall or create a vertical garden tower. No matter the size or location of your garden, every plant you grow helps bees and other pollinators that are in desperate need of protection and saving. Our survival depends on their survival.

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