

BEES



Leafcutter bee (credit: Jenn Forman Orth)

Think of Bees and you will, almost certainly, think of busy honeybees and fuzzy bumblebees. Massachusetts is home to an astounding 300 species of native bees, from the tiny Squash Bee to the stunning metallic green Adrenid Bee. Whether they live in the ground, a hive, your compost pile or in little mud nests on the siding of your shed, bees are the main reason that you are able to grow vegetables in your garden. While it's true that bees can sting, they are not aggressive and will move on if disturbed. They are busiest early in the morning so, if you are nervous of working alongside them, you'll be happiest working in late afternoon.

As bees visit plants in search of sweet, sugary nectar, the hairs on their bodies and legs accumulate pollen. This pollen is spread from blossom to blossom, fertilizing them and causing the plant to grow a seed, which we know as a delicious pea pod, a tomato, a pumpkin or a pepper. We take full credit for our harvest but, in fact, this largely unseen workforce does the bulk of the work. This is the most compelling reason not to spray your garden with insecticides. Even some organic pest management products can kill bees so read the labels carefully, treat your plants at dusk when bees are not active and only treat the leaves not blossoms.

Growing a wide range of vegetables will make your garden a bee magnet and you can encourage them to stay near by planting herbs amongst your vegetables. Dill, rosemary, lavender and oregano are firm favorites. To keep mint within bounds plant it in pots. Harvest your herbs for the kitchen, but allow some stalks to flower and take some time to watch these welcome visitors, and marvel at their industry and beauty.



Clockwise from top: Honey bee, Adrenid bee, Bumble bee (credit: Gaynor Bigelbach)

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Garden Insects of North America: The Ultimate Guide to Backyard Bugs | Whitney Crenshaw

The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Pest and Disease Control | Jeff Ball