

Gardening for native bees

Cut back on the mulch

Gardeners love mulch and it does have its benefits. However half of our native bees dig nests in the soil and a layer of mulch will discourage them from taking up residence in your garden. Leave a few suitable areas free of mulch for the bees.

Minimise your use of weed barriers

Barriers of black plastic or landscape fabric may be an easy solution for keeping the garden weed free but bees can't tear through these barriers to reach the soil surface. Rethink your weeding strategy. If you must use a barrier, try laying down newspapers instead – they'll biodegrade over time.

Plant a range of native plants that flower early spring to late autumn

Native bees prefer native plants, but they won't wait around until your garden is in flower. Bees need pollen and nectar to live, and if they can't find flowers in your garden they won't settle in. Furrow bees begin foraging as soon as spring arrives, while resin bees and leafcutter bees often become active in summer. Plant a variety of locally native plants that provide flowers from early spring to late autumn and you'll keep native bees happy all year. Yellow and blue are bee colours by eminence. Eucalypts, hakeas, peas and eremophila are very attractive.

Plant buzz pollinated plants

Honey bees cannot use buzz pollinated plants so by providing them, you provide an edge for native bees. Senna, fringe, flax and chocolate lilies, Hibbertia, Solanums (including tomato) and Lasiopetalum are all buzz pollinated. Make sure there are nectar producing plants close by (Scaevola, blue flowering Eremophilas, Christmas bush, Boobialla are all good).

Leave some areas of your garden free of vegetation

Many native bees nest in the ground. These bees usually seek out slightly compacted soils, not too dry, not too wet, with at most light traffic, that are free of vegetation. Yes, they are picky! Look for existing nests and leave or make a few patches of bare soil around so they can burrow and they won't have to travel so far to pollinate your flowers. Remember, ground nesting bees like morning sun and afternoon shade.

Plant plants with pithy vines or canes

Dwarf carpenter bees, which grow to just 8mm, spend their winters nestled inside hollowed out canes or vines. Come spring, the females expand their pithy burrows and lay eggs. When pruning dead branches with pithy centres, leaving a stretch of 10 cm or more above the node can allow bees to construct a nest.

Limit pesticide use

Chemical pesticides, particularly broad spectrum pesticides, can negatively impact native bee populations. Use pesticides conservatively, or better yet, not at all. By doing so, you'll also encourage beneficial predators to stick around and feed on your insect pests. For aphids on trees, try using sticky stuff on the trunk to remove the access by ants. This will allow beneficial predators and parasitic wasps to get the problem under control.

Leave dead wood for wood nesting bees

Resin bees often use old beetle bores in dead wood.

Don't mow your lawn so often

Many weeds provide good sources of nectar and pollen. Mowing trims these flowers. Try to let your lawn grow a little longer before you mow.

Install some artificial nests for resin, masked and leafcutter bees

Resin, masked and leafcutter bees make tube-shaped burrows in which they lay their eggs. These bees don't usually excavate their own burrows, preferring to find existing cavities and build within them. Fill a tin with a bundle of waxed paper drinking straws, mount it to a fence post in a shaded area as artificial nest. You can also drill some holes in a block of wood or poke holes in drying clay.

Plant native plants for native bees

Plant local native plants for gardens, hedgerows and windbreaks that will thrive without much attention (water them over the first summer after planting).

Bees generally prefer white, yellow, blue and purple flowers but planting a diverse range of flowers and having flowers throughout the year is the objective.

Try these plants.

Trees

Gum trees	Eucalyptus species
Bottle brushes	Callistemon sp, eg. <i>C sieberi</i>
Wattles	Acacia species

Shrubs

Honey myrtles	Melaleuca sp eg. <i>M. decussata</i>
Tea Trees	Leptospermum species

Christmas bush
Emu bushes
Bush peas

Native lilac (climber)
Daisies

Smaller plants

Goodenias

Boobialla
Fan flowers
Australian bluebells
Bulbine lily
Native flax
Native buttercup
Daisies

Bursaria spinosa
Eremophila species
Pultenaea sp.,
Daviesia sp.,
Platylobium obtusangulum
Eutaxia microphylla
Hardenbergia violaceae
Oleria species

Goodenia species,
eg. *G. ovata*, *G. albiflora*,
G. blackiana
Myoporum parvifolium
Scaevola species
Wahlenbergia species
Bulbine bulbosa
Linum marginale
Ranunculus lappaceous
including *Xerochrysum*
species
Chrysocephalum species
Vittadinia species

Plants to encourage blue banded bees and other buzz pollinating bees

Shrubs

Cassia	Senna species
Velvet bush	Lasiopetalum species

Smaller plants

Flax lilies	Daniella species
Chocolate/Vanilla lilies	Arthropodium species
Guinea flowers	Hibbertia species
Fringe lilies	Thysanotus species
Pink-eyed susan	<i>Tetralathea pilosa</i>

