

Native Pollinators

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When one thinks about native pollinators, the social bees – honey and bumble – usually come to mind. Though bumble bees are native to the Americas, honey bees were imported from Europe in the 1600's. Native pollinators can also include solitary (also called primitive) bees, butterflies, moths and hummingbirds. Some of the earliest spring pollinators are solitary bees. Locally, we have social bees and solitary bees. Their nesting strategies and behaviors partly describe each of the species. In Washington we have many types of solitary bees, including leaf-cutter, sweat, digger, mining, mason and carpenter bees, with the most common being the Blue Orchard Mason bee which is often mistaken for a house fly.

The size of bees varies, ranging in size from only 2 mm (0.08 in) in length, up to 4 cm (1.6 in) long. Many bees are black or gray; others are bright yellow, red, or metallic green or blue.

In addition to different sizes and colors, there are different shapes of bees. Some have rounded abdomens, while others are tapered, coming to a point. Some have long, slender bodies, whereas others are robust. Some have larger heads, like leafcutters, which have large muscles used for cutting leaf discs for making nests. The difference in shapes may be due to how the bee forages on the flower or where it collects and stores pollen on its body.

Unlike social bees which have one laying queen, all solitary females lay eggs. She creates a nest in which she constructs chambers to lay eggs. The nesting medium depends upon the type of bee. She will create chambers to lay her eggs, filling the chamber with pollen and nectar to feed the developing bee.

Some ways to entice pollinators into your yard is to include native flowering plants, select a multitude of colors and provide resting spots in sun and shade. Planting flowers in clumps and having a diverse selection of plants year-round will tempt not only bees, but butterflies, moths and hummingbirds as well. All these pollinators can easily be seen, even in your home garden, so go out and have a look!

Start planning now to attend the Jefferson County Master Gardeners' 2011 Secret Garden Tour which will be held on Saturday, June 18, on the Toandos Peninsula in SE Jefferson County. Go to www.jefferson.wsu.edu for more information.