

## Where have all the bee's gone?

When most people in Ontario think about bees, their minds immediately go to honey bees. Many don't realize that honey bees are actually a non-native species that were imported from Europe. These bees only represent a small fraction of bee species that we have throughout Canada.

Most native bees are solitary, meaning that they don't belong to a colony. They fly alone and do not swarm. Solitary bees don't bother to protect their own nests. The adult female lives for one season. She lays her eggs and stores pollen for her offspring who overwinter in the nest. They also don't need a hive like other bees. They create individual nests in the ground, in a tree, a raspberry stem or even under a rock.

Bees play a critical role in maintaining natural plant communities and ensuring production of seeds in most flowering plants, including food producing plants. Bee populations are declining quickly throughout the world, and even closer to home in southern Ontario. There are speculations on what might be causing their decline, including habitat loss, the use of pesticides known as neonicotinoids and extreme weather events.

Since our native bee populations are difficult to track, it can be difficult to estimate how their numbers are being reduced. The rusty-patched bumblebee has given us a good look into native bee populations. This bee was once the most plentiful native bee throughout Ontario and Quebec. Its population has declined so drastically, that over the past decade there have been only three reported sightings and it is now in danger of becoming extinct.

With all that native bees do for us, it's time we started giving back to them. Here are some simple ways that we can help our native bees:

1. Don't use of pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers on your lawns. In June 2008, the Cosmetic Pesticide Ban Act was passed. This bans the use and sale of lawn and garden pesticides. For more information on this ban, [click here](#).
2. Plant native flowers on your property. Native flowers are designed to attract and support native pollinators. Choosing plants with a variety of bright colours (such as purple, red and orange) and different bloom times will help attract more pollinators to your property. Native Plants can be found at garden centres, nurseries and at local native plant sales.

North American Native Plant Society – [Commercial Native Plant Growers](#)

Ontario Invasive Plant Council – [Nursery Recognition Program](#)

3. Buying local and organic produce. These products were grown without the use of chemicals that can be dangerous to bee populations.

For more information on attracting more pollinators to your yard, visit our [Stewardship website](#). If you have any questions or would like to share any of your native pollinator stories, please feel free to contact:

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