



NATURE AT RISK

By Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association

Why Backyard Pollinators Are All the Buzz

May 2023

For all the people with backyard bee hives these days, you'd think that bees were, well, rolling in clover.

But if you know someone who keeps bees, you've heard them bemoan the parasites, diseases, and just plain mysterious collapses that can affect honey bee colonies. Keeping hives healthy is time- and labor-intensive, and takes serious know-how.

Wild bees are more forgiving.

Most are solitary. Females make a single nest in rotting wood, a dead-tree snag, the ground, even leaf litter or another creature's abandoned nest. Because they don't have hives to protect, they aren't aggressive. (If you get stung, it's likely a yellowjacket or other wasp, not a solitary bee.)



Many have very limited foraging range — 300 to 3,000 feet from their nest. That means they need food — flowers — from the earliest warm spring mornings to the coldest fall afternoons.

They also need to be protected from pesticides, which kill everything in their path, including essential workers like wild bees.

Wild pollinators like solitary bees pollinate dozens of fruits and vegetables humans eat. They also pollinate wild plants like milkweed, huckleberries, crabapples, shadbush and redbuds — whose fruit other animals and birds eat.

It's easy to give wild bees a helping hand.

First, lay off the pesticides, or at least use them sparingly (and never broadcast them). It's better for the bees, and also healthier for you, your family, birds, and pets. Find ways to welcome bees to your yard. Consider providing a "bee box" for bees that nest in wood. Offer birdbaths or puddles of water, and add a variety of flowering shrubs and plants that provide pollen and nectar all season long.

Need some ideas? A few plants to try are Canadian columbine, blue spiderwort, Joe Pye weed, milkweed, wild bergamot, purple coneflower, and asters like blue mist flower. If you can't find native plants like these at local garden centers, Brodhead Watershed Association offers native plants for sale at <https://shop.brodheadwatershed.org>

Your garden — and the bees — will thank you!

Brodhead Watershed Association is dedicated to protecting water quality and quantity in the Brodhead Creek and its tributaries. Native plants, animals — and bees — are part of the web of life supported by pure, abundant water.