Pollinators are a diverse and fascinating group of animals. In addition to their beauty, pollinators provide an important link in our environment by moving pollen between flowers and ensuring the growth of seeds and fruits. The work of pollinators touches our lives every day through the food we eat. Even our seasons are marked by their work: the bloom of springtime meadows, summer berry picking, pumpkins in the fall.

There are 4,000 species of native bees in North America. Together they form the most important group of pollinators. Like all wildlife they are affected by changes in our landscapes, especially the loss of nesting sites. Bees make nests in which they create and provision brood cells for their offspring. In many modern landscapes, a desire for neatness has usually resulted in the removal of bare ground, dead trees, and untidy corners of rough grass—all important nesting sites for bees.

This fact sheet gives information on how to provide nest sites for native bees, including nest blocks and bare ground for solitary-nesting bees, and nesting boxes for bumble bees.

For more information, visit our web site, www.xerces.org, where you will find other fact sheets and more detailed guidelines on how to enhance habitat for pollinators. You'll also find information about Attracting Native Pollinators. Protecting North America’s Bees and Butterflies.
Bumble Bees

Unlike the nests built for solitary bees there are no strict size requirements for bumble bee nests—any hole large enough for a small colony will be OK. After emerging from hibernation, a bumble bee queen will hunt for a dry, warm cavity in which to start her colony. In natural conditions, most bumble bees nest in abandoned mouse holes in the ground or under grass tussocks. Where you can, keep patches of rough grass. Where you can’t, consider building a nest box or two.

- **Nest box.** A simple wooden box, with internal dimensions of about 7” by 7” by 7”, made from preservative-free lumber will work. Drill a few ventilation holes near the top (covered with door screen to deter ants) and some drainage holes in the bottom. Make an entrance tunnel from 3/4” plastic pipe, marked on the outside with a contrasting color, and fill the box with soft bedding material, such as upholsterer’s cotton or short lengths of unraveled, soft string. The box must be weather tight; the larvae may become cold in a damp nest, and mold and fungus will grow.

Place the box in an undisturbed site, in partial or full shade, where there is no risk of flooding. The box should be on or just under the ground. If you bury it, extend the entrance tube so it gently slopes up to the surface. Put your nesting box out when you first notice bumble bees in the spring, or when the first willows and other flowers are blooming, and be patient. There is no guarantee that bees will use your box. Only about one in four boxes get occupied. If it has no inhabitants by late July, put the nesting box into storage until next spring.

For more pollinator conservation information, go to www.xerces.org

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