

How To Design An Easy Bee and Pollinator Garden



Layouts for gardens in Zone 6b Pittsburgh, and many other hardiness zones.

Bee-friendly gardens are fairly easy to grow and maintain. You probably already have the beginnings of one in your landscape's garden design, as well as plants that cater to the needs of other pollinators. If you wish to raise bees and have honey, too, you'll need a quick-start Bee 101. Especially useful will be the information for those who have small-space or urban gardens. Even if all you have is a small terrace or balcony, you can still have a sweet-smelling bee garden. If you also grow vegetables, fruits or flowering ornamentals, you'll want a happy bee pollination. There are several pollinator [garden layout designs on this site that you can download free](#). This page has information specific to helping the [honeybees](#) make it through the hive collapse catastrophes, habitat loss, pesticides, diseases and environmental stresses.

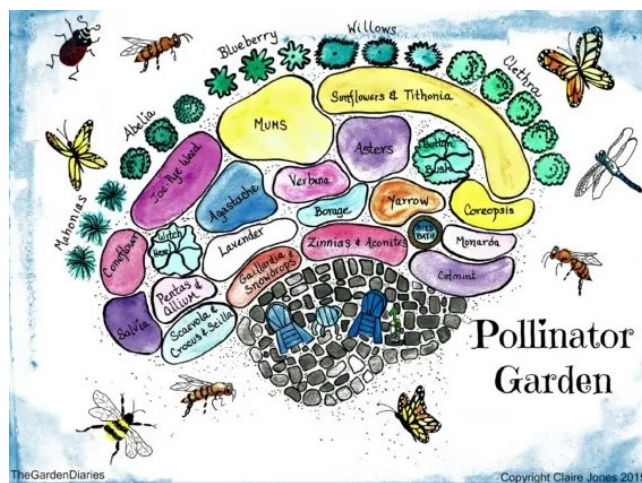
When i started an urban garden a decade ago, all i had to work with was a blank slate. One dead little tree, lots of grass, and no plants. No honeybees, very few other bees, and not even a handful of butterflies. Birds never visited the empty space. None had any reason to wander into my yard. All that is changed now, and there are several micro-environments, habitats and pollinator gardens. Butterflies are here all day in summer, and i've added a [Monarch Garden](#) to help them survive their trips to Mexico in the fall. I am happy to report that my milkweed garden was host to a Monarch I named "Fred" who was tagged by Monarch Watch for tracking his migration south. I dug out every blade of grass by hand and pitchfork, and replaced the water-wasting lawns with landscaping and gardens.

You can design a garden that focuses on one or all of these types of pollinator gardens, and design it to be productive whatever size you choose. [A bird habitat](#) serves several purposes. I like to call the resident birds "accidental pollinators". Even the hummingbirds we love to watch spread the love from plant to plant.

A little about the bees....

Fact: If the bees don't survive, we don't either. Simply stated, if our bees go extinct, we starve to death.

Bees are needed by food growers and our farmers to produce the crops of grains, produce and fruit that we depend upon as part of our food chain. Many crops are essential to the farming of animals for consumption. It's wise to take it seriously. If you grow fruits and vegetables, and even if you just love flowers, you want bees to pollinate all of your landscape. My fruit and flower production, as well as my veggies, are noticeably better and the crops larger with the bees working their magic. I have seen them busily collecting and spreading pollen to my young and dwarf fruit trees in flower (flowers=fruit), and they're here doing that until dusk. I work quietly in the areas they frequent and have never been chased or stung. I respect their need to work, and we share the space. I'll do pruning or picking in the evening or early morning.



I learn more about them daily as i garden for the other pollinators. For instance, i was baffled for a while about dead bees and wasps in my birdbaths. When i spotted a butterfly drink and stand on a small stone i had placed in it, to dry it's wings, i figured it out. I no longer put out deep, decorative bowls without ornamentally placing stones or branches partially above water for them to use to climb out after occasionally falling in when they drink. I learned this same lesson about birds taking their baths in the deep bowls, slipping under the water, and not being able to take flight out of the slippery bowls. Most birdbaths are shaped so that all creatures can drink or bathe safely,

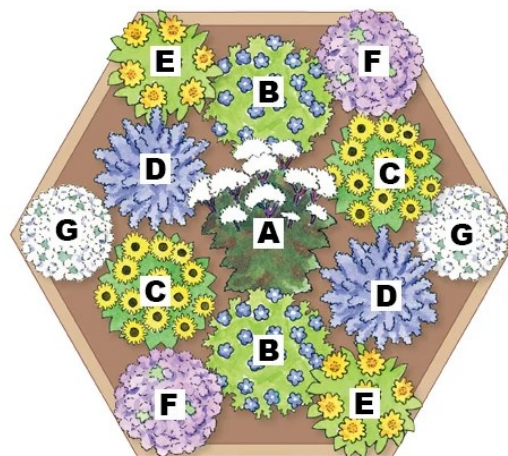
and climb or fly out, but some are purely ornamental and include fountains, and homemade water features (using deep bowls from your kitchen that are decorative) are too deep for beneficial insects and baby birds without something in it to grasp onto.

You don't need to host thousands of bees in your garden or grow hundreds of plants. You don't have to become a beekeeper or harvest honey. A few well-chosen and well-placed plants will do the trick, and will pollinate your entire garden. You don't have to devise an elaborate hive system if you want a little honey. So all of you with small spaces for gardening will benefit from pollination and the aromatherapy. Most gardens for pollinators contain several types of plants that are quite colorful and fragrant.

Easy Bee Garden



Gardener's Supply Company



| Key | # of Plants | Plant Name | Notes |
|-----|-------------|---|---|
| A | 1 plant | Chocolate Joe Pye weed <i>Eupatorium rugosum</i> | Bronze-purple foliage, and white flowers in late summer. Perennial, zones 4-9. |
| B | 2 plants | Rozanne cranesbill (aka perennial geranium) <i>Geranium</i> hybrid | Blue-violet flowers in summer. Perennial, zones 4-10. |
| C | 2 plants | Little Goldstar black-eyed Susan <i>Rudbeckia fulgida</i> <i>*I would substitute this with Agastache - This pretty flowering plant smells like mint or anise - and attracts all pollinators and also attracts hummingbirds.</i> | Daisy-like flowers have yellow petals around dark-orange centers. Perennial, zones 4-8. |
| D | 2 plants | Cat's Meow catmint <i>Nepeta faassenii</i> | Gray-green foliage is topped with spikes of blue flowers. Perennial, zones 3-8. |
| E | 2 plants | Orange calendula (aka pot marigold) <i>Calendula officinalis</i> | A ring of orange petals surrounds each flower's yellow-orange center. Annual. |
| F | 2 plants | Garden thyme <i>Thymus vulgaris</i> | Tiny, pale-purple blooms. Perennial, zones 5-9. |
| G | 2 plants | Snow Princess sweet alyssum <i>Lobularia</i> hybrid | Small white flowers attract a variety of pollinators. Annual. <i>Note: you can substitute the perennial Snow in Summer (cerastrium).</i> |

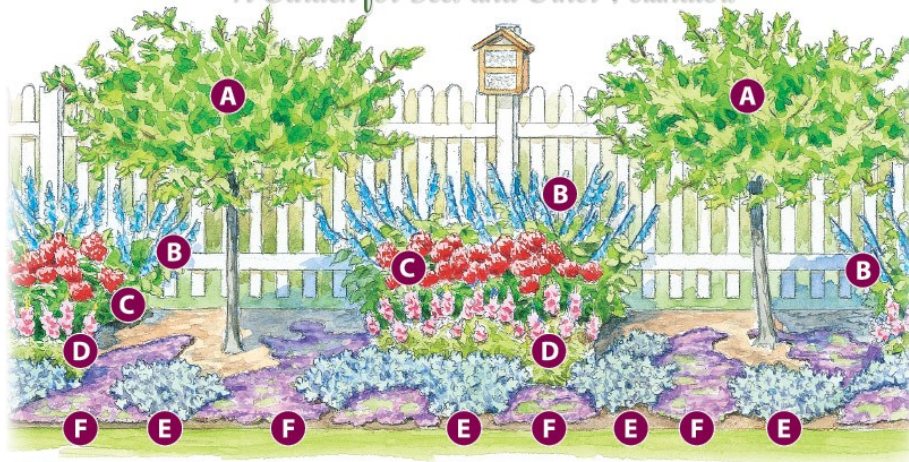
Meet The bees

Honeybees are social bees, and **the only ones that live in hives and produce harvestable honey**. They were introduced to North America from Europe almost 400 years ago. Honeybees are specially effective at pollinating fruits, vegetables and nuts.

Native bees are more efficient pollinators than honeybees. They work longer hours, tolerate harsher weather and pollinate a much wider range of flowering plants. In the U.S. there are more than 4000 species of native bees, including bumblebees, mason bees and leafcutter bees. Most species are solitary, but some form colonies. They typically nest and lay their eggs in the ground or in stems and sticks.

Other native pollinators include **butterflies**, moths, beetles, flies, **hummingbirds** and some species of bats

A Garden for Bees and Other Pollinators



- A. Flowering Crabapple Tree
- B. Salvia
- C. Garden Phlox
- D. Snapdragons (annual)
- E. Sedum
- F. Creeping Thyme

Feel free to substitute your favorite plants for these. Make sure you choose plants with similar attributes appropriate in your hardiness zone.

Design from Garden Gate Magazine

*I would substitute lilac, rose of sharon, or ruby clethra for the crabapple trees. They are shrubs and take up less space. You can grow 2 in the space if you choose to grow those. If you're interested in the crabapple tree, try to find a dwarf variety.

What Bees Need to Survive

Food

Pollination is a byproduct of feeding. Pollinators visit flowers to drink nectar or gather pollen. While they are feeding, pollen sticks to their bodies and is moved around on the flower. Some of it is carried onto the next flower they visit. Gardeners can support pollinators by growing flowers that are rich in pollen and nectar.

Pollinators need access to pollen and nectar from early spring through late fall. Planting a diversity of trees, shrubs, and flowering plants will ensure your yard provides a dependable supply of food from one season to the next. Native plants should also be included, because they attract and sustain a greater number and wider diversity of pollinators. **Flowering weeds have been shown to attract 4 times more pollinators than domesticated plants. Here's how to care for the bees visiting your garden.**

The more varied your landscape, the more attractive it will be to pollinators. A yard with layers of trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals and ground covers provides many more shelter and nesting options than a half-acre of lawn.

Research the kinds of bees you could attract to the area, or whether you wish to keep honey bees. This will affect the choice of plants. Select flowering shrubs and low maintenance trees and climbers, as well as bulbs, herbs and perennial plants. Do some research into local species, and the kinds of plants they need. This is a great opportunity to provide forage for species that need to revive population numbers. In the Pittsburgh area, that valuable resource is Burgh Bees. I prefer and suggest an easy care garden that attracts any type of bee and pollinator. My goal is pollination and fragrance, so that's the type of design I use. For honey production, i would focus on planting just for that goal.

Following is a pretty and long-flowering pollinator garden design from Garden Supply Company. The 12x8 design shown in the layout is suitable for other themes and plantings in your garden.

12'

| | | | |
|--|----|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | 10 | Beardtongue | Penstemon digitalis |
| | 3 | Butterfly Weed | Asclepias tuberosa |
| | 3 | Claire Grace Wild Bee Balm | Monarda fistulosa 'Claire Grace' |
| | 3 | Heavy Metal Switchgrass | Panicum virgatum 'Heavy Metal' |
| | 3 | Kobold Blazing Star | Liatris spicata 'Kobold' |
| | 5 | Ohio Goldenrod | Oligoneuron ohioense |
| | 1 | Phantom Joy Pye Weed | Eutrochium maculatum 'Phantom' |
| | 10 | Prairie Dropseed | Sporobolus heterolepis |
| | 5 | Purple Prairie Clover | Dalea purpurea |
| | 3 | Wild Petunia | Ruellia humilis |
| | 3 | Yellow Coneflower | Ratibida pinnata |

You can swap out any plant or color that is suitable for your hardiness region, and shares the same attributes

Herbs for bees and other Pollinators

The herbs you plant are not only for bees, but also for your plate, aromatherapy or medicinal purposes.

* = the plants growing in my pollinator gardens in zone 6, Pittsburgh, Pa.

**Marjoram/Oregano

Borage

Chives

*Lavender

*Agastache, Hyssop (hummingbird mint). Hummingbirds can't resist it. This pretty plant has flower spikes that attract all types of pollinators. The foliage can smell like anise or mint, depending on variety. Long-blooming.

comfrey

*sage - I grow lemon and common sage

*thyme - I grow creeping lemon thyme

Summer Savory

Mints - quite invasive, so be sure to grow in pots

*Parsley

dill

lemon balm

*Rosemary

Fennel

Angelica

*Bee Balm (Monarda). I grow several types and colors. Easy to propagate. A true bee magnet.

Betony

Myrtle

Catmint

Minimize your use of pesticides. Pesticides can kill beneficial insects along with harmful ones. Be sure to identify the problem first, so you can use the most targeted pest-specific remedy. Always follow labeling instructions carefully and spray at dawn or dusk before bees are active. Avoid spraying plants that are in full bloom. Avoid using herbicides. When applied alone or in combination with other chemicals, herbicides can pose a danger to bees. As with pesticides, always avoid spraying weeds when they are in bloom.

Bee gardening, raising bees, and harvesting honey

'Burgh Bees – Urban Beekeeping At Its Best

If you live in the Pittsburgh, Pa. region, you'll want to visit this site for info and resources. Home gardeners can support or raise bees with their help. Classes available for budding beekeepers.

Urban Bee Gardens

Gardening for Bees – Seasonal Recommended Plant Lists. University of California.

HOW TO START BEEKEEPING

11 ACTION STEPS

- 1 Learn beekeeping basics**

 - * Books
 - * Courses
 - * Blogs
 - * YouTube
 - * Online Forums
 - * Local Associations
 - * Mentors
- 2 Find a suitable location**

 - * Accessible
 - * Good airflow/drainage
 - * Check local regulations
 - * Near water, pollen, nectar
 - * Respect neighbors
- 3 Determine your budget**

 - * Estimated first year cost is \$725
 - * Cost will vary based on options you select
- 4 Order your honey bees**

 - * Bee package OR
 - * Nuc
 - * Buy local if possible
 - * Order early (Dec/Jan)
- 5 Choose a hive type & order**

 - * Langstroth hive is best choice for beginners
 - * Horizontal hive may be desirable for some
- 6 Buy beekeeping tools**

 - * Bee smoker
 - * Hive tool
 - * Bee brush
- 7 Buy protective clothing**

 - * Veil to cover head
 - * Beekeeping suit OR
 - * Beekeeping jacket
 - * Gloves
- 8 Set up your beehives**

 - * Assemble in advance
 - * Paint early
 - * Ready when bees arrive
- 9 Install your bees upon arrival**

 - * Understand package vs. nuc installation
 - * Consider feeding sugar syrup to kickstart
- 10 Continue your education**

 - * Keep reading, etc.
 - * New things to learn for the next step
- 11 Manage your colonies through their first year (this step is actually an ongoing process)**

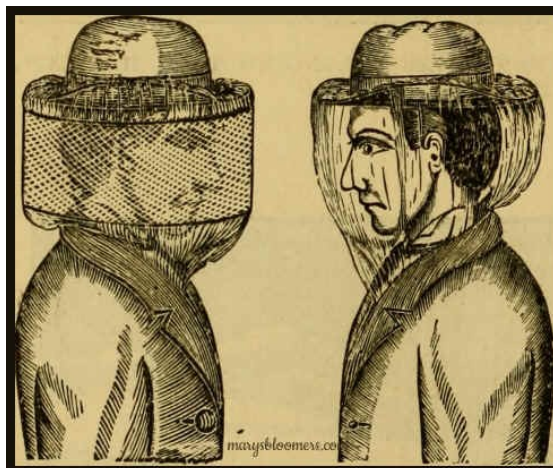
 - * Regular inspections to monitor health and status of the colony
 - * Remediate issues noted during inspections
 - * Add and remove boxes as needed
 - * Limit impact of robbing activity
 - * Prepare for and get through winter

For a complete guide visit us at
<https://www.beekeepingfornewbies.com/how-to-start-beekeeping/>

 **Beekeeping For Newbies**

Sources

- Gardener's Supply Company
- Garden Gate Magazine
- Keeping Backyard Bees
- Your Garden Sanctuary
- Beekeeping For Newbies



*Detailed Site Directory-->**Say hello!**Quick Links*

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <i>Buddha Serenity Gardens</i> | <i>Native American Three Sisters Gardening</i> | <i>Flowers and Their Meanings</i> |
| <i>Easy Butterfly Gardens</i> | <i>Winter Gardens</i> | <i>Hindu and Ayurveda Gardens</i> |
| <i>Mediterranean Diet Vegetable Garden</i> | <i>Old-School Gardening Wisdom</i> | <i>Create A Biblical Garden</i> |
| <i>Dwarf Fruit Trees In Pots</i> | <i>Grow Your Autumn Decor</i> | <i>Monarchs and Milkweed</i> |
| <i>Autumn Colors Garden Design</i> | <i>Download Free Garden Design Plans</i> | <i>Chakra Gardens</i> |
| <i>African American Heritage Garden</i> | <i>Botanical Mythology and Nature Folklore</i> | <i>The Hummingbird Garden</i> |
| <i>Espalier Gardens - How To Espalier Trees and Shrubs</i> | <i>Mary Gardens -Sacred and Symbolic Plants</i> | <i>Beginner Habitats for Songbirds</i> |
| <i>Heirloom Grandmother Gardens</i> | <i>Hardy Giant Hibiscus and Rose of Sharon</i> | <i>Creole/Cajun Gardens</i> |
| <i>Tea Garden Retreat</i> | <i>Create a Cottage Garden</i> | <i>Native American Medicine Wheel</i> |

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