

There is estimated to be over 1,500 species of native bee across Australia with approximately 300 species residing in South Australia around the Mount Lofty Ranges. Unlike the European honeybee (Apis mellifera) which nests in hives and provides a nasty sting, native bees are mostly solitary and generally don't sting (unless provoked). They don't produce honey like the European honeybee, but they do an excellent job of pollinating native plants, our food and clothing crops and our home garden, fruits and vegetables!

Native bees come in a range of sizes and colours, from bright blues and yellows to brown and black. Identifying them can be tricky as they sometimes resemble hoverflies or wasps. Aussie bees hold an important position in our ecosystem.

Not only do they do an excellent job at pollinating our fruit, vegies and other crops (even better than the European honeybee), they are the sole pollinator of certain native plants. Many native bees use a technique we call 'buzz pollination', which means they rapidly buzz (much quicker than the European honeybee) inside a flower to release pollen and get to the nectar. For plants such as tomatoes, eggplants and capsicums, buzz pollination is a much more efficient method and usually results in better, tastier crops.

Enticing native bees into your garden is easy if you provide the right habitat, enough food and water and are conscious of which sprays you use in the garden.

## Habitat

As discussed previously, most native bees aren't social and don't nest together in hives (keep in mind there are exceptions). Instead, they build their own nests or burrows. Depending on the species, this can take place in the bark of old trees, between rocks, the hollow stems of plants (mainly reeds and grasses) or in holes they dig in bare soil, sand or clay embankments. Some native bees even use cuttings they have taken from of leaves or resin from trees to build their nest.

If you're creating a habitat for bees in the garden, try to leave areas free of mulch, as mulch makes it difficult for burrowing bees to dig.

Something else you can do to attract bees to your garden can also be a fun DIY day with the kids or with friends... Constructing a Bee Hotel! These 'hotels' can take on many shapes and sizes, the more creative the better! The fantastic thing about Bee Hotels is that they provide a place for the bees in your garden to stay, while also providing areas for many other insects in the garden to inhabit. Bee Hotels are popping up all around Adelaide.

For information on where to locate them and how to build your own, check out the Natural Resources web page: https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/water/managing-water/ water-courses/improving-river-torrens-foothills-to-sea/native-bee-bnb-project



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## Food

With the introduction of the European honeybee, native bees have had to compete for resources including water, habitat and most importantly, food! If you want native bees to hang around in the garden it is important to provide enough food to keep them happy. When choosing plants to put in the garden, try to pick species that native bees prefer and plant flowers that bloom at different times of the year. This will ensure they stay around through every season. Try to choose a variety, as different species will prefer different sizes and shapes when it comes to flowers. For useful information on which species to plant and which species are best for your area, visit the Natural Resources web page: https://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/plants-and-animals/native-plants-animals-and-biodiversity/urban-biodiversity

Native bees prefer native species, but they also like to visit other flowering plants in the garden. Some the non-native species they like to visit in the garden are rosemary, sage, thyme, oregano, mint, basil, parsley, chives, lavender, salvias, most daisy bushes, borage, fruit trees (when in blossom), roses, camellias, nepeta and statice. Some of the flower colours that native bees seem to prefer are blue, purple, violet, yellow and orange. Keep in mind that bees see the world in ultra-violet light, so what we see and how bees see flowers are completely different. Try to avoid flowers that have been bred to have a second set of petals. These are known as 'doubles' and they lack the pollen producing anthers that bees look for.

## Water

Providing a reliable water source in the garden that stays full year-round will attract not only bees but other beneficial insects and birds to your garden. When providing a water source for your bees to visit, make sure the dish is shallow and has a rock or branch positioned in it to offer an area to land or for them pull themselves out if they should fall in.

Checking the dish regularly in the warmer months is vital to ensure the bees can rely on it as a regular water source.

## Sprays

One of the reasons bee populations are in decline globally is the use of agricultural and home garden sprays including insecticides, herbicides, miticides and fungicides. Bees are under threat from just about every spray used in the home garden. They are sensitive little creatures that don't appreciate even the 'eco-friendly' chemicals.

Think before spraying in the garden: 'What consequences will this have further down the chain?' and 'Is there an alternative to spraying?'. There are many home remedies that can be used as effective alternatives. If spraying is your last resort, always read the warnings on the back of the bottle before use and try to avoid spraying when bees are active, such as when plants are in flower.

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