Photos courtesy of the USGS Bee Lab

5 ways to help wild bees

Pollinator Advisory Committee
Public Act 16-17

Please direct all communications and inquiries to the Office of the CAES Director.

1. Learn About Bee Diversity

Not all bees are the same. **Over 390 bee species have been documented in Connecticut**, each with unique roles in pollinating crops and wild plants. Some wild bee species are thriving, while others are in serious decline. Some bees are generalists, visiting many flower types, while others are specialists, relying on specific plants. Nesting needs also vary: some species have adapted to human-modified landscapes, while other species are tied to very specific natural habitats or soil types. Because of this diversity, a one-size-fits-all approach to bee conservation doesn't work. Understanding which bees you want to support is the first step toward effective action.

2. Foster Natural Habitat

Lawns, pavement, and heavily manicured landscapes offer little value to pollinators. Instead, consider planting a variety of native flowering plants that bloom from spring through fall, leaving patches of bare soil to provide potential nesting habitat, and allowing some areas to remain wild. Natural features like dead wood and leaf litter can provide essential nesting sites for solitary bees. By mimicking natural conditions, you help ensure that bees have access to the food and shelter they need throughout their life cycles. Minimize the use of man-made materials, like bee hotels, because they disproportionately support non-native species and often harbor pathogens and viruses.

3. Don't Release Commercially Produced Bees

Releasing commercially bred bees may seem like a helpful conservation effort, but it can unintentionally harm wild bee populations. Captive breeding programs may also produce lower-quality individuals, weakening the genetic diversity of local populations. Because many bee species are difficult to identify without expert knowledge, there's a risk of introducing the wrong species, ones that may outcompete or disrupt native bees. Even correctly identified bees may struggle to survive if released into unfamiliar environments.

Important: In Connecticut, it is illegal to import and liberate any invertebrate into the wild without a permit (CGS Section 26-55). Instead, focus on creating healthy bee habitats in your neighborhood for pollinators to recover and thrive.

4. Follow Pesticide Labels and Regulations

Pesticides can be highly harmful to bees, even when used with good intentions. To reduce risk, it's essential to always follow federal pesticide labels and state-specific regulations. These guidelines are designed to protect pollinators by restricting when and how certain chemicals can be applied. For example, many products should not be used during bloom or when bees are actively foraging. Applying pesticides in the early morning or late evening, when bees are less active, can also help minimize exposure. By using pesticides responsibly—and only when truly necessary—you can help protect both managed and wild bee populations from unintended harm.

5. Have a Conversation

One of the most powerful tools for protecting bees is simply talking about them. Sharing what you've learned with neighbors, friends, schools, or local officials can spark awareness and inspire action. Whether it's encouraging pollinator-friendly gardening, discussing pesticide use, or supporting local conservation efforts, open conversations help build a community that values and protects pollinators. You don't need to be an expert; just being curious, informed, and willing to engage can make a meaningful difference. Change often starts with a single conversation.

Visit https://portal.ct.gov/caes/publications/publications/pollinator-information for more information about the bees that live in Connecticut, recommended plants for specialist and generalist bees, guidance on protecting bees from pesticides, resources for managing Varroa mites, and a community guide to creating pollinator habitat, as well as many other resources.