

Bees need plants that need bees

Bees need plants that produce pollen and nectar, and many plants rely on bees for pollination.

Native plants and native bees naturally go together, so native flowering plants are always a great choice. Native plants are also a good idea for other reasons: they are adapted to our climate and soils, and, once established, they rarely need to be watered. They also provide habitat for local birds and other wildlife.



Image courtesy Rod Gilbert

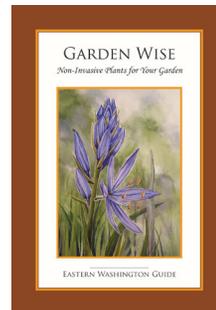
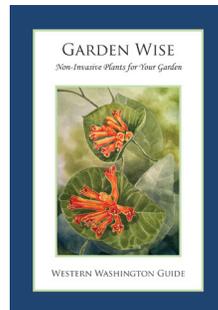
And there are also thousands of non-native, non-invasive garden plants that benefit bees, too, including our important European honey bees. To make your garden or landscaping beneficial to bees and other pollinators:

- Provide plants and shrubs that flower in spring, summer and fall to keep bees in business during the whole growing season.
- You don't have to limit yourself to big, showy flowers; bees are equally fond of the small flowers found on heathers, lavender, and similar plants as well. They also like herbs including dill and chives, and the flowers of vegetables such as cucumbers and melons.

Helpful Resources

There is a lot of great information about choosing and growing native and non-invasive garden and landscaping plants for pollinators. Check out the following websites for guidance:

- The Xerces Society at www.xerces.org
- Pollinator Partnership at www.pollinator.org
- Plants for Pollinators in the Inland Northwest at www.nrcs.usda.gov
- 10 Ways to Protect Bees from Pesticides at agr.wa.gov
- WSU Master Gardener Program at mastergardener.wsu.edu
- Washington Native Plant Society at www.wnps.org



Contact us for a copy of our publications such as *GardenWise: Non-invasive plants for your garden* and *Full Circle: Control noxious weeds, grow healthy plant communities, and support bees and other pollinators*. Visit our website to learn more about noxious weed control, download more of our publications, and find your local county noxious weed board.

www.nwcb.wa.gov
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Bottom cover image of native brodiaea (*Dichelostemma congestum*) and bumblebee, courtesy of Rod Gilbert



Bees and noxious weed control: finding common ground



Busy as a Bee

It's no wonder bees are busy; pollinating so many of the world's plants is a big job. Without bees to pollinate them, all those plants couldn't make seeds, and most would die out.

It's hard to imagine how different our landscapes would look without bees. Our dinner tables would look different, too. Apples, pears, cherries, cranberries, raspberries, beans, squash, and a long list of other plants we eat all depend on honey bees as well as wild bees for pollination.



Image courtesy Dr. Sarah Cooke

Bees are in trouble

Bees – both native wild bees and the European honey bees that beekeepers manage – are in trouble. In recent years, bee populations have plummeted. Many beekeepers have been devastated by “colony collapse disorder” – a dying-off or disappearance of honey bees. A combination of problems is probably to blame.

- One likely cause of bee mortality may be one or more bee diseases or parasites, such as mites.
- Pesticides, especially insecticides, used in the wrong place at the wrong time can also be part of the problem.
- The loss of habitat and nutritious forage plants is another reason for the decline of many bees.

So, how can you help? One of the best things you can do is replace noxious weeds with quality non-invasive forage plants that bees and other pollinators need to stay healthy.

Noxious weeds and bees

It is important to control noxious weeds to help protect our diverse native plants, natural resources, and agriculture. Although some noxious weeds may serve as forage for bees and other pollinators, the detrimental impacts of these invasive plants significantly outweigh their value as a pollen and nectar source.



Marty Hudson, Klickitat County NWCB

Yellow starthistle is believed to make great honey. However, this noxious weed also rapidly colonizes rangeland and outcompetes grasses and wildflowers that livestock and wildlife need to survive. Not only is yellow starthistle less nutritious than valuable forage plants, but the spiny flowerheads injure livestock and can cause fatal chewing disease in horses.



Invasive knotweed species are valued by many beekeepers since they bloom later in the season than many other plants. But knotweeds can take over riverbanks, displacing valuable native plants, disrupting riparian ecosystems, and degrading habitat for salmon and other animals species. The massive root systems can damage infrastructure by breaking through pipes and roadways. Knotweed can be very tough to control.

Bee-sensitive weed control

You can do your part to control destructive noxious weeds and still be the bee's knees.

Replace noxious weeds with non-invasive, pollinator friendly plants that bloom from spring through fall to provide bees and other pollinators with food throughout their active season. There are many resources available about noxious weed control and bee-friendly gardening, including your local county noxious weed control board, WSU Extension office, and conservation district.

Consider the control of existing noxious weeds as a first step in your long-term management plan.

Developing a healthy plant community can help prevent the reestablishment of new weeds while providing habitat for wildlife and forage for pollinators. For example, after controlling noxious weeds that interfere with your crops or reduce pasture or lawn grass quality, plant native plants species along the field edges to increase wild bee diversity and support honey bees too. Transform under-utilized patches of land into beautiful, pollinator friendly gardens.

Timing is important. Make sure to time your noxious weed control so that it minimizes disturbance to those busy bees.

- Do your control work in the morning or in the evening when bees are less active.
- Control as many noxious weeds as you can in early spring, fall, or even winter when plants are not in bloom.
- Plant desirable species in conjunction with the weed control so the bees still have a source of nectar and pollen. If you are converting a large infestation, replace sections at a time instead of doing it all at once.

