



Bees Why we need bees and how to help them

Bees are important to us in so many ways. Without them our lives would be very different but sadly bee numbers are falling. What do bees do for us and how we can help to keep them alive? Look at this poster then read the text to find out.



Bees pollinate £23 billion of crops each year

A world without bees would be a sorry place indeed as we need these pollinating insects for so many things. Bees pollinate 70% of the 100 or so crops that feed most people around the world. That's over £23 billion worth of crops each year!

Bees are perfect pollinators

Without these busy little pollinating insects, we would have no fruits, cereals, seeds, nuts or grains, and barely any vegetables. That means no apples, pears, oranges, lemons, tomatoes, cucumbers or avocados. No pasta, rice, couscous, lentils or bread. No soup, jam, mustard, olive oil, vinegar or ketchup. No biscuits, cakes, tarts, pastries or pizza. And no tea, coffee or hot chocolate either!

We need bees for ice cream

It's not just the plants we eat that that rely on bee pollination. Animals like cows, sheep and goats get protein from seeds of flowering plants such as clover and alfalfa. No bees = no seeds, so animals wouldn't get the protein they need to build muscle for meat or produce milk which we use for cheese, cream, yoghurt – and ice cream! Meals would be very different wouldn't they?



Bees even make our clothes

Fabrics like cotton and kapok (Java cotton) are produced from the seeds or seed cases of plants. If these plants weren't pollinated then there wouldn't be any seeds and we wouldn't be able to make cotton. It's surprising just how many things we use cotton for. As well as t-shirts, underwear, bedsheets, towels, blankets and cotton wool cotton is used in bandages, home insulation, fishing nets and tents. In many countries, including Morocco, banknotes are even made from cotton!

Bees make gorgeous gardens

Britain and Europe would be nowhere near as pretty without bees, as around 80% of European wildflowers need bees to pollinate them. Think of all those beautiful public gardens our parents like to drag us around too - wouldn't they look different without all the lovely flowers that bees pollinate?

We need bees for ice cream

It's not just the plants we eat that that rely on bee pollination. Animals like cows, sheep and goats get protein from seeds of flowering plants such as clover and alfalfa. No bees = no seeds, so animals wouldn't get the protein they need to build muscle for meat or produce milk which we use for cheese, cream, yoghurt – and ice cream! Meals would be very different wouldn't they?

BUT...

Bees are in danger

Bee populations around the world are falling sharply. There are many reasons for this, including the loss of bees' natural habitats and food sources. Other reasons are the use of some pesticides by farmers and gardeners, pollution, pests and diseases, and climate change.

One in ten wild bee species faces extinction in Europe and 13 have vanished from Britain since 1900. In China, numbers of bees have fallen so low that fruit growers have to pollinate all the flowers on the pear trees in their orchards by hand. This means dipping feathers in pollen and brushing it into the centre of every flower. As there are hundreds of flowers on each tree you can imagine how long it must take to pollinate a whole orchard by hand!

Here are some ways you can help them:

Look after the environment

It's important to care for our native wildflowers because these are what our bees have been living on for hundreds if not thousands of years! Bumblebees in Britain and Europe have only 30% of their favourite plants left so we need to look after them.

Plant flowers for bees

Plant nectar-rich flowers in pots and borders. If you have enough space, you could even plant a bee-friendly garden! In Britain, some of the best native flowers for bees are Welsh poppies, cornflowers and bluebells. In Morocco, honey bees adore thyme, oregano, citrus, eucalyptus and spurge, and delicious honeys are made by the bees which visit these plants.



Make a bee pond

Bees need water to drink as well as sweet nectar for food. Fill an old plate or a shallow container with fresh water and leave it on a level surface near some bee-friendly plants.

Stop cutting your lawn

Leave part of your grass lawn to grow tall and wild – it's the perfect home for lots of different bee species.

Leave a bit of mess

Many wild bees live in the hollow stems of dead plants or in holes in dead wood. Others live in small holes in sandy banks, piles of sand, old mortar in walls and even in the ground. Leave a little mess in the garden as it could be the perfect habitat for a species of bee!

Make a bee hotel

Use air-dry clay to make a 3D shape, then poke deep holes into it with your fingers before leaving it to dry in the sun. When it's dry, place your bee hotel in a sunny spot facing towards the sun. Make sure to place the hotel at least a metre off the ground with no plants blocking the holes. Solitary bees like mason bees and leafcutter bees love to live in places just like this!