

**WHEN YOU THINK OF THE WORD “BEE,” WHAT SPRINGS TO MIND?**

If you said “sting,” “yellow and black” or “honey,” you are certainly not alone with your word associations, but you are 90 percent incorrect. Why? Because what most people associate with bees, only applies to social bees, such as honey and bumble bees. And those types of bees make up merely 10 percent of the world’s bee population.

Ninety percent of the world’s bees, an estimated 20,000 species, are solitary bees. This means that they live and work alone; they do not divide the labor like social bees. The female solitary bees are essentially “single moms” that find the housing, lay the eggs and provide for their young. The males live a short two weeks as adults and aren’t around to help. As for the “busy as a bee” saying, let’s give credit where credit is due: solitary female bees are the busiest.

The fact that solitary bees don’t have a worker bee on special assignment to defend the nest makes these bees very gentle, virtually stingless. Even if a person were to get stung, the sting is more like a mosquito bite and there are no known allergic reactions to these stings.

Solitary bees are also not just yellow and black. They exist in a rainbow of colors and sizes ranging from less than one-sixteenth of an inch to over an inch and a half.

Solitary bees do not make honey. But what they lack in honey-making skills, they make up for in pollination. Their pollination efficiency is 60-150 times better than honey bees.

Solitary bees’ anatomy sets them up to be amazing pollinators. They are generally hairy little critters and have a rather unsophisticated way of carrying pollen. They basically belly flop onto blossoms and cover their abdomens with dry pollen. As they fly to the next flower, pollen scatters everywhere.

Pollinators are in peril and have been making headlines. Most of the discussion has been about the Honey Bee which accounts for less than 1 percent of the world’s bee population. Some solitary bees’ populations are declining rapidly too, but they are much harder to study because of their illusive nature.

We are beginning to realize that we need to think about the health of pollinators because much of our food supply largely relies on their pollination. Protecting pollinators is a common-sense form of self-preservation.

According to E.O. Wilson in “The Forgotten Pollinators,” Eighty percent of the species of our food plants worldwide, depend on pollination by animals, almost all of which are insects.

**BEE FACTS AND MYTHS COVERED**

- **ALL BEES STING.**
- **HONEY BEES CAN STING THEIR VICTIM REPEATEDLY.**

- **PEOPLE WHO ARE ALLERGIC TO WASP STINGS ARE ALSO ALLERGIC TO BEE STINGS.**
- **BEE STINGS CAN BE USED TO TREAT ARTHRITIS SYMPTOMS.**
- **MOST BEES LIVE IN HIVES.**
- **BEES ARE HARD WORKERS.**
- **ADULT BEES LIVE A LONG TIME.**
- **YOU CAN AVOID BEE STINGS BY SPRAYING THE NEST WITH WATER.**
- **BEES WON'T STING AT NIGHT.**
- **IF YOU RID YOUR LAWN OF DANDELIONS AND FLOWERS, IT KEEPS BEES AWAY.**
- **SEALING UP THE HOLE IN A WALL WHERE BEES ARE NESTING WILL KILL THE BEES INSIDE.**
- **DO NOT FEED HONEY TO BEES**
- **EATING LOCAL HONEY EVERY DAY PREVENTS ALLERGIES:**
- **JUMPING INTO WATER IS A GOOD WAY TO AVOID A BEE STING:**
- **USING TWEEZERS IS THE BEST WAY TO REMOVE THE BEE STINGER:**
- **TAPING A COPPER PENNY OVER THE BEE STING RELIEVES THE SWELLING:**
- **Bees live in complex societies:**
- **HONEYBEES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT POLLINATORS TO THE HOME GARDENER:**
- **DON'T FEED SUGAR WATER TO EXHAUSTED BEES.**

**This is the myth people keep quoting about how bees shouldn't be able to fly.  
This is scientifically incorrect —**

### **POLLINATION MYTHS**

- **SWEET PEPPERS AND HOT PEPPERS NEED TO BE SEPARATED IN THE GARDEN, OR YOU'LL BE SURPRISED WITH HOT SWEET PEPPERS:**
- **CUCUMBERS AND SQUASH SHOULD NEVER BE PLANTED NEXT TO CANTALOUPE OR HONEYDEWS, OR THEY WILL CROSS-POLLINATE, AND YOU'LL END UP WITH BLAND-TASTING MELONS:**
- **TOMATOES ARE SELF-POLLINATING, SO NO SPECIAL ISOLATION STEPS ARE NECESSARY FOR SAVING SEEDS FOR REPLANTING NEXT YEAR:**
- **SINCE BEAN FLOWERS SELF-POLLINATE BEFORE THEY OPEN, THE SEED WILL ALWAYS BREED TRUE FOR SEED-SAVING:**

Most of these pollinator topics have been compiled from numerous sources in the web over the past couple of months. I found many misstatements and myths out in 'Web' land. I hope I have clarified some of those myths. Any errors or of my own making.

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