

## Our Other Native Americans – native bees

- Bees are a large group of insects of the superfamily Apoidea which does not include wasps.\*
- Bees come in many sizes - from very tiny to the larger bumble bee. Some have short tongues and feed on flat-topped flowers while others have long tongues to reach long-necked flowers. That is why a garden should have a variety of flower shapes and sizes so all bees can reach the sweet nectar a plant provides.
- Bees are important for pollinating many plants including many of the foods we eat.
- There are more than 4,000 species of bees in North America.
- All bees are covered with fuzzy hairs, some have more than others. Pollen sticks to these hairs. Most female bees have pollen-collecting baskets on their bodies. Males do not collect pollen and lack this structure. In most species the pollen is combed into this special basket, usually located on their hind leg. Some bees carry pollen on their bellies. Because many bees are so fuzzy, they often get covered with pollen and that is how plants get pollinated.
- **Most Native Bees live solitary lives.** That means they don't live with other bees in hives like the European honeybee. The majority of our solitary bees live in the ground (i.e. squash bees, mining bees). Each female bee constructs a nesting tunnel and stocks her brood cells with pollen and nectar for her baby bees (larvae) where they develop over several months. Adult bee's lives are short. Certain species are active at different times throughout the season coinciding with floral resources that meet their needs. A few native bees live in hollow plant stems or tunnels in wood left by beetles (i.e. mason bees, leaf-cutter bees).
- Solitary bees are not aggressive and rarely sting because they have no hive to protect.
- **Native bumble bees** (like their honeybee cousin) **are social bees.** They live in colonies, consisting of a queen, female workers and males (drones). Bumble bees are ground nesters living in abandoned rodent holes and under bunch grasses or in upside down flower pots, under boards and other man-made cavities. Usually docile, their mission is to provide nectar and pollen for the colony but they will sting in defense of their colony or when otherwise threatened.

\* Wasps (include yellow-jackets & hornets) – Wasps do not have pollen-collecting hairs like their bee cousins because they do not eat or collect pollen for their larvae. They may visit flowers to sip nectar for quick energy but are strictly meat-eating insects.

Many wasps are live solitary lives and are very beneficial, feeding on many garden pests. They construct cells of paper or mud. Solitary wasps have no hive to protect and generally are not aggressive.

Social wasps live in colonies. They lay their eggs in comb cells made of paper either above or below ground. Yellow Jackets and White-faced Hornets are examples of social wasps. They aggressively protect their hives and willingly sting. However, all wasps are beneficial in controlling garden pests.