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abqBackyardRefuge.org

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Resources:

The Bees In Your Backyard:

A Guide to North America's Bees

Joseph S. Wilson and Olivia Messinger Carril

beesinyourbackyard.com

treeschoolnm.com

xerces.org

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Refuge Program**
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Protect Bees and Trees!

Bees are essential to pollination in our wild spaces and in our backyards. There are over 1000 bee species in New Mexico; they range in size from the size of a pin head to the size of a thumb, and in hue from red, green, or blue, to black-and-white or yellow-checked. Each female bee collects pollen and nectar from flowers, which she carries back to the nest to leave for its offspring.

With habitat fragmentation, agricultural pesticide use, and climate change, our urban environments are becoming ever more important as refuges for these important creatures. It is important that we make choices in the landscapes around our houses that support wild bees.

Supporting wild bees is easy! Just think: "Air Bee and Bee".

Air: The resources a bee needs should be close enough together that a small bee can make it from its nest to the flowers it visits and back.

Bed: Unlike our honeybees, who nest in hives, wild bees frequently nest in the ground, with nests ranging from 3 inches to 15 feet deep. They are opportunists, and can take advantage of any patch of undisturbed earth. Bees are discrete, covertly nest right under our noses, and it is rare to see a bee enter its ground nest. Other bees nest in beetle burrows carved into woody material, or old plant stems.



Wren

“Air Bee and Bee”, continued...

Breakfast: Bees need food in the form of native flowers, with different colors, sizes, shapes, and plant families to suit all of the many bee species found in the region. Having plants that bloom for the duration of the warmer months will support the widest range of bees.

Bees are forgiving and resilient animals. They will benefit from even the smallest gesture in the form of a potted plant, some undisturbed vegetation, (yay! Less weeding!), and a moment of thought for their nests in the ground.

Weed barrier is detrimental to the success of most wild bees. With over 70% of our native bees building nests in the ground, weed barrier is similar to pavement, in that it creates an impermeable membrane through which the bees can't go. ***Because we don't often see bees using their nest entrances, it can be easy to forget that this material is so difficult for our wild bees to navigate.***

Interestingly, studies have shown that weed barrier is detrimental to trees as well. Because water penetrates through weed cloth differently, the presence of this cloth often leads to more water evaporating from the soil and less moisture making it to tree roots. As drainage is affected by weed barrier, the likelihood of wet bee nests can also change.

Many plants use fine, near surface feeder roots, which weed fabric blocks from functioning. These tiny feeder roots constitute most of a root system's surface area. Some feeder roots may grow in the dirt that settles on top of the weed fabric as the plants try to “work around” the plastic.

Weed cloth might seem like a time-saving ‘friend’ that makes life easier, but after time it rises to the surface and looks terrible, and weeds start to establish themselves on top anyway!

Weed barrier only stops deep-rooted weeds, but affects all ground-nesting bees. Many of our most difficult weeds establish on top of weed barrier after it has been placed, meaning that its efficacy in keeping unwanted plants at bay is minimal. Because bee nests are so variable in depth and construction from species to species, there are bees that are impacted by its presence no matter how it is used.

I already have weed cloth in my yard. What should I do?

Remove the rocks or mulch and pull out the cloth carefully. If you have heavy gravel or a thick layer of accumulated soil, this can take much time and effort! Just start with a small space if it seems overwhelming.

Remove enough cloth to add some pollinator plants and leave some undisturbed soil for ground-nesting bees!

Alternatives to weed cloth

Laying down cardboard or layers of newspaper and covering them with plant-based mulch such as wood chips or leaves can minimize or prevent the growth of weeds.

Native groundcover such as native grasses, white yarrow, native oregano, desert zinnia, artemisias, and spurges can outcompete weeds.

