



Why do bees matter?

Bees are a necessary and valuable part of Portland and Multnomah County ecosystems. Many plants—and by extension other species—within the city and county depend on pollination by bees. Honey bees and other pollinating insects provide humankind with more than just honey; 35% of all the foods we eat rely on pollination, which is how plants reproduce and survive.



Where are the bees?

Bees and other pollinators are all around us, occurring both in nature and in hives kept by beekeepers. Most beekeepers within Portland have a small number of hives, although there are larger commercial beekeepers throughout Oregon. **Whether bees are raised by a beekeeper or establish their own hive in nature, they fly up to two miles to gather pollen.** So anywhere you go in Portland and Multnomah County, you might see bees.

Why would someone want bees in their backyard?



Portland and Multnomah County have many backyard beekeepers. Bees improve the health of our gardens and of the ecosystem overall. Some families use beekeeping to teach their kids hands-on science. Some love the smell and taste of fresh honey. Some find watching a working hive soothing, like watching a fish tank. Even if your household doesn't keep bees, you may enjoy the effect of bees in your garden, as these natural pollinators help plants flourish.



Aren't bees dangerous?

Not unless their hive is attacked. Bees—unlike mosquitoes—do not require, seek, or desire contact with humans. **A single sting costs the life of a honey bee, which is why bees, unlike wasps or yellow jackets, are not aggressive insects.** Unfortunately, people sometimes confuse wasps or yellow jackets with bees. Although cartoons, horror films, and ads for exterminators often misrepresent bees as vicious, honey bees are not aggressive.



What about killer bees?

Africanized bees, sometimes called “killer bees,” are not native to Oregon, and can't survive in the climate of Multnomah County. You shouldn't see any “killer bees” here, unless you are watching a science fiction film.

What about stings?

Because a sting costs the bee its life, bees generally don't want to sting people or pets. You can watch a bee visit a flower just inches from you, and not get stung. But when people harass a bee hive, swat at a bee, collide with a bee, or get a bee entangled in their hair or clothes, the bee's reflexive response is to sting. If a bee lands on you, stay calm and hold still until it flies away. If you swat at or blow on a bee, it may become defensive and sting.

For most people, a sting is annoying but doesn't require a visit to the doctor. **Swelling and pain at the site of the sting are normal.** Removing the stinger right away (by scraping it off with a fingernail or the edge of a credit card or pulling it out with a tweezer) will speed recovery. An ice pack will reduce swelling. An over-the-counter antihistamine may also reduce swelling.



What if I'm allergic?

Swelling from a bee sting is normal, and is NOT a sign of a life-threatening allergy. **A very small portion of the population (less than 3% of adults and 0.5% of kids) may have more serious systemic reactions to a sting. Anyone who experiences nausea, wheezing, or difficulty breathing after being stung needs immediate medical care.** These are rare responses, and they are easily treated if you get immediate medical attention. (For more information see www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=11067) If you have a history of severe allergic reactions to stings, your doctor may advise that you keep and know how to use an epinephrine autoinjector (such as EpiPen®), in case you are stung in the future. Because both bees and people move around within the city, if you are in the small percentage of people whose doctor advises carrying this treatment, remember to keep it with you.



What about those funny outfits?

Beekeepers sometimes wear special light-colored “suits” and veiled hats when they are opening a hive (to extract honey, to check the health of the bees, etc.). But most of the time, there is no need to wear bee suits around bees, unless you are intentionally opening or moving a hive.



What about swarms?

Swarms are a natural phenomenon that occur when a hive becomes too crowded. A large group of bees will follow the queen bee out of the overcrowded hive and cluster—on a tree branch, a fence post, etc.—while a few scout bees seek out a new place to build a hive. Although seeing so many bees clustered in the open is strange, **swarms are not aggressive.** In fact, swarming bees have no honey or brood (developing eggs) to protect, so they are usually very docile. Experienced beekeepers can gather a swarm and move it into a hivebox without even donning a bee suit. If you see a swarm and would like to help, please report it on our website, PortlandUrbanBeekeepers.org/swarm, and you will be connected to the nearest experienced beekeeper. They will be happy to come get the swarm and give it a good home.



PortlandUrbanBeekeepers.org/swarm

Aren't all the bees dying anyway?



In the past few years, there has been a worldwide increase in the deaths of entire colonies of bees. Because bees are such an important part of healthy ecosystems, and particularly crucial for the production of so much of the food on which people depend, this is definitely a source for concern. It's likely that multiple causes (possibly including pesticide use, mites, and disease) are contributing to colony collapse disorder. But many hives continue to thrive, and scientists, along with commercial and recreational beekeepers, are eager to help identify and address the causes so we can keep more bees healthy.



Where can I learn more?

Oregon State Beekeepers Association (OSBA) provides information statewide on bees and beekeeping. It has regional branches throughout the state. www.orsba.org

Portland Urban Beekeepers, a chapter of OSBA, provides information about beekeeping in Portland. www.portlandurbanbeekeepers.org

Portland Metro Beekeepers Association, a chapter of OSBA, provides information about beekeeping across the metro area. www.orsba.org/htdocs/pdx.php

Xerces Society is an education, advocacy, and research organization focused on the conservation of invertebrates (bees, butterflies, starfish, etc.) and their habitats. www.xerces.org

