

Bee Bottoms

This is a fun activity to illustrate how bees pollinate flowers.

Time: 10 minutes

Ages: 5 and up

Materials Required: Cotton swabs cut in half, black and yellow felt markers (optional)

Nature-Friendly Park Experience: Help keep people, wildlife and habitat healthy.

Stay on designated trails at all times. Walking off trails can damage small plants and tree roots.

Admire flowers without picking them. Animals use them for food and to make homes.

Everything in the park must stay in the park. All things found in nature have a role to play.

What's all the buzz about?

Most people are familiar with honeybees, but may not know that we have over 5,000 native bees in North America. Many of them don't have stingers because they're solitary and live in unexpected places: bumblebees live underground, mason bees make logs their home and leafcutter bees are snug in a curled up leaf.

Our native bees are three times better pollinators than non-native honeybees because they gather more pollen than nectar. They also specialize in native flowers, whereas honeybees are generalists and forage on a wide variety of plants in clumps.

Discussion

1. What are your favourite flowers, fruits and vegetables?

Bees live all around the world, and they are the reason we get to enjoy so many delicious fruits and vegetables. One out of every three bites of food we eat is thanks to our friends, the bees, who pollinate many of our food crops and plants fed to farm animals. Bees also pollinate flowering trees and wildflowers, which in turn provide food and homes for other animals and improve water, air and soil quality.

2. What does pollination mean?

Bees travel from flower to flower gathering nectar and pollen to bring back to their hive to feed the queen and young bees. Pollen is an excellent source of protein. When a bee lands on a flower, she slurps up nectar with her long tongue and wiggles her bottom to collect pollen, which will stick to her legs, from the stamen of the flower. She will fly from flower to flower transferring pollen from one plant to another. This is called pollination, which allows the flowers to produce seedlings.

If you are lucky enough to encounter a bee busily at work on a flower, search its legs for a small lump about 1 mm in size of yellow, orange, blue or purple pollen. They're pollen baskets, little pocket-like structures designed to collect and carry pollen.

3. What are some ways you can help bees in your own backyard?

You can stop using pesticides and plant lots of different native flowers. You can increase habitat by letting the grass grow longer, have bare earth patches and create hiding places with logs and sticks.

Would you like to try being a bee?

Demonstrate how to use the cotton swab “bee bottom” by gently touching the middle of a flower with the cotton swab. Emphasize gently so the delicate flowers aren’t damaged. Hand out the cotton swabs. The participants can use felt markers to colour the tips with black and yellow lines to resemble a honeybee or leave it plain. Send the participants and their bee bottoms in search of flowers to pollinate. Don’t forget to leave the flowers as you found them because real bees depend on them.

Remember to buzz like a bee! Bzzzzz!