

Buzzing About Pollinators!

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Adapted for the Madison County Resource Education Program

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Key Words

nectar: a sweet liquid found inside many flowers
pesticide: a mixture used to kill insects on plants
pollen: small, dusty grains made by many plants
pollenation: carrying pollen from flower to flower
scientist: someone who studies the natural world

Bees Have a Big Job

What kinds of food do you like to eat? Strawberries? Cherries? Peaches? What about watermelon? The next time you bite into one, thank a bee!





A bee visits cherry blossoms. Bees help to make these good-tasting cherries!

Bees are a very special kind of animal called a **pollinator** (pawl-in-ate-er). Pollinators do an important job. They help plants make many of the foods we eat.

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Can you name the delicious berries you see here? Bees helped to make them!

Looking for Nectar

Do you like drinks that taste sweet? So do bees! When you see a bee flying from flower to flower, it is looking for drink of **nectar**. Nectar is a sweet liquid (lick-wid) that many flowers make. Sometimes, bees must crawl deep inside a flower to find nectar.





A bee looks for nectar on a strawberry flower. A second bee sticks its head inside a jewelweed flower to look for a sweet drink.

If you look closely at a bee, you will see that its body is covered in fuzz. The fuzz on a bee's body does a special job. When a bee crawls inside of a flower, something called **pollen** sticks to the bee's fuzz. A bee's small, fuzzy body is just right for getting pollen.





Look closely at this honey bee. Its body is covered in fuzz! Pollen sticks to the fuzz when bees visit flowers.

Pollen Must Move!

Pollen looks like very tiny specks of dust. It is small but flowers can make lots of it. Pollen can float through the air in the springtime and make us sneeze! It is often bright yellow but it can be many colors--red, brown, green, even gray-blue!





These buds from a pussywillow plant are covered in pollen and so is this bee! Do you see the dusty pollen all over its body? In order to make fruit like pears, apples, and blueberries, the flower of one plant must have pollen from the flower of another plant. When bees look for nectar, they pick up pollen from one flower and leave some behind in another. Taking pollen from flower to flower is call **pollination** (pawl-in-ay-shun).





This is one busy bee! It picks up pollen from one flower and leaves some pollen behind in other flowers. It will do this over and over. Many plants need bees to pollinate them. Flowers that are not visited by bees do not make fruit that is very large or good to eat. They might not make fruit at all.

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Bees Are Not the Only Ones

Almost all plants need the help of a pollinator to move pollen from flower to flower. Bees do lots of pollinating but they are not the only ones! Many other animals pollinate flowers, too. Butterflies visit flowers to look for nectar to drink, just like bees. They also carry pollen from flower to flower.



Butterflies like these are also pollinators. A butterfly's mouth is a long tube that helps it reach nectar deep in a flower.

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Hummingbirds are also pollinators! They have long, thin beaks that help them find nectar deep inside flowers. Hummingbirds carry pollen from flower to flower, just like bees and butterflies. Insects like flies, ants, wasps, and beetles can also be pollinators.



Hummingbirds are also pollinators. What parts of a hummingbird's body might help it reach nectar?

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Pollination Can Happen at Night

Most flowers are open during the day and close their petals when the sun sets. Some flowers stay open at night. Flowers that stay open after dark are pollinated by animals that are awake at night. Can you think of two small animals that might visit flowers at night?



Some moths and bats pollinate at night! Flowers with light colors and a strong smell are easier for animals to find after dark.

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This pollinator may look like a bird, but it is a moth! Its full name is the hummingbird hawk-moth.

Not All Pollinators Are the Same

Butterflies do not always pollinate in the same way as bees. Many butterflies pollinate wildflowers. Bees pollinate many fruits and vegetable plants. Pollen does not stick to a butterfly's body as much as a bee's body. How are other pollinators not the same?

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Pollinators in Danger

We need pollinators to help plants make the foods we love to eat. Pollinators also help make more wildflowers and plants that are homes for other animals.



We need pollinators to help make juicy peaches like these. For a list of more plants that need bees, read page 32.

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Many pollinators are in danger. In past years, large groups of bees have died. Some **scientists** (sy-en-tists) think that bees are hurt by small insects called mites. Mites move into beehives and make bees sick. Scientists also think that some **pesticides** (pes-ti-sides) hurt bees. People spray pesticides on their gardens to kill harmful insects. Sometimes, the spray kills bees.



Tiny mites like this one can get inside bee hives and make bees very sick. Pesticides that kill other insects may also harm bees.

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Pollinators are hurt when their homes are cut down. Birds, bees, butterflies, and insects must have safe places to live. If pollinators do not have homes, they cannot live or raise their young.



Patches of wildflowers and plants like these are home to many kinds of animals. They need pollinators to help new plants grow and make a safe place to live.

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There are many things kids like you can do to help pollinators where you live. Some things you can do are:

1.Give pollinators a home by planting trees or making a garden with plants and flowers pollinators like.

2. Don't use pesticides at home. If you must use them, find ones that are safe for bees.

3. Tell your family and other about the important job pollinators do!

Facts and Lists

Some of the fruits and vegetables pollinated by bees are:



More Resources

For more information and ideas about helping bees and other pollinators, visit:

The Honey Bee Conservancy www.thehoneybeeconservancy.org

World Wildlife Fund www.worldwildlife.org/pages/1-million-for-monarchs

National Geographic Kids www.kids.nationalgeographic.com

National Resources Conservation Service www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/gardeners/

Or, visit the website of your state's Department of Natural Resources.

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