



## Fact sheet - Creating your Flora for Fauna Garden

### Attracting Native Bees to Your Garden

**Information courtesy:** Australian Native Bee Research Centre  
 PO Box 74-FF  
 North Richmond NSW 2754  
 Website: [www.zeta.org.au/~anbrc/](http://www.zeta.org.au/~anbrc/)

Over 1,500 species of native bees grace the gardens and bushland of Australia! Our largest native bee is a stocky 24 mm carpenter bee with a glossy black abdomen and a bright yellow furry waistcoat; our smallest species is a minute, almost hairless bee, less than 2 mm long.

The native bees most often seen by Australian gardeners include:

- Blue Banded Bees (*Amegilla*)**  
**Most species 8–13 mm long**  
 With bands of opal blue or whitish fur across their black abdomens, blue banded bees love visiting purple flowers such as lavenders. Groups of males are sometimes seen clinging to a grass stem at night.
- Teddy Bear Bees (*Amegilla*)**  
**Most species 7–15 mm long**  
 These fat bees, covered with thick light brown fur, nest in shallow burrows in the soil.
- Leafcutter Bees (*Megachile*)**  
**Most species 6–15 mm long**  
 Many gardeners first discover leafcutter bees when they notice the neat oval or circular pieces that the bees have clipped from the edges of soft leaves. The bees weave these leaf pieces into tiny cells for their young.
- Stingless Social Bees (*Trigona* and *Austroplebeia*)**  
**Most species 3–4 mm long**  
 These charming black bees are Australia's own native honeybees. They build resinous nests inside hollow trees and store their aromatic honey in tiny pots.



An Australian blue banded bee  
 (© ANBRC)



Teddy bear bee (© ANBRC)



Leafcutter bee (© ANBRC)

Australia's magnificent native bees make a fascinating study for the garden enthusiast and can also provide a valuable pollination service for the home veggie garden. Carpenter bees, blue banded bees and teddy bear bees are capable of a special behaviour, called *buzz pollination*, which is ideal for the flowers of tomatoes, capsicums, eggplants and chilli peppers.

The best known native bees in Australia are the stingless social bees. These are true Australian honeybees with a queen, drones and hundreds of worker bees in each nest. However, their nests and behaviour are quite different from those of the introduced European commercial honeybees. The stingless bees may be seen in the garden on warm days throughout the year.





Most Australian native bees, though, are solitary and are only seen in the warmer months from September to March. Each female builds a tiny nest by herself in a burrow in the ground, or in holes in soft timber or twigs. She stocks a tiny cell with nectar and pollen, lays an egg, seals the cell and then abandons it. By autumn most adult solitary bees die. However, the developing young bees live on in their cells, emerging in the next spring to fly amongst the flowers. Solitary native bees can sting but most are too small to give an effective sting and they are not aggressive.

Gardeners can choose a wide variety of plants to attract and support native bees. Some plants provide valuable supplies of nectar and pollen for the bees whilst others assist the bees with their nest building.

Good food plants for native bees include *Angophora* and *Eucalyptus* trees, *Brachyscome* groundcovers, grevilleas, *Leptospermum* and *Westringia*. Leafcutter bees love collecting pieces of soft leaf for nest building from plants such as *Senna clavigera*, and the slender reed bees build their miniature nests inside dead pithy stems of plants such as tree ferns.



A Wasp-mimic bee on a gum flower  
(© ANBRC)

Many non-native plants such as the Butterfly Bush (*Buddleja davidii*), lavenders, roses, salvia and daisies also attract native bees.

Resin bees and leafcutter bees like to build nests in deep narrow holes in timber. Gardeners can support these bees by providing artificial nest sites for them. A simple bundle of bamboo canes hung in a tree can provide attractive nest sites for these bees. Holes (4 – 9 mm wide and at least 80 mm deep) can also be drilled into a piece of old hardwood timber. For more details and diagrams of artificial nests that you can make for native bees, see the book, *Native Bees of the Sydney Region: A Field Guide*.

Native reed bees also love nesting in the dead canes of the lantana plant. When people remove these plants from their garden or bushland they often don't realise they are destroying the colonies of these native bees. Please check for these nests and relocate them before removing stands of this weed. See the *Aussie Bee* website for more details.

Native bees are a delight to watch and they provide a vital pollination service for our bushland wildflowers. Please support and encourage these beautiful Australian bees in *your* garden!

**Further Information:**

The **Aussie Bee Website** presents photographs and information on many Australian native bee species: [www.zeta.org.au/~anbrc/](http://www.zeta.org.au/~anbrc/)

***Native Bees of the Sydney Region: A Field Guide***, by A Dollin, M Batley, M Robinson and B Faulkner, published by the Australian Native Bee Research Centre. Copies of this guide are available through the *Aussie Bee* website.





## Some of the Best Native Plants for Native Bees

### ***Brachyscome***

These long-flowering ground covers are popular with stingless bees.

### **Callistemon – Bottlebrush**

These nectar-rich flowers also attract native bees.

### ***Ceratopetalum gummiferum* ‘Alberys Red’ - Christmas Bush**

This large shrub, with dense cream flowers in springtime, attracts many native bees.

### **Eucalyptus**

Gum blossom is often covered with clouds of native bees.

### **Grevilleas**

Many Grevilleas such as *Grevillea Moonlight* provide good nectar for bees.

### ***Hibbertia scandens***

The Common Teddy Bear Bee and the Common Blue Banded Bee love buzzing the flowers of *Hibbertia scandens*.

### ***Leptospermum polygalifolium* - Lemon Scented Tea Tree**

*Leptospermum* species are in the ‘top ten’ list in [Native Bees of the Sydney Region – A Field Guide](#).

### ***Scaevola humilis* - Fan Flower**

Many small native bees and leafcutters visit these flowers.

### ***Senna clavigera***

The Common Teddy Bear Bee, the Common Blue Banded Bee and the Emerald Homalictus buzz the flowers of this bush. Leafcutters also clip pieces of the leaves for their nests. Long flowering period.

### ***Thryptomene saxicola* FC Payne**

This graceful winter flowering shrub attracts stingless bees and other native bees.

### ***Westringia fruticosa* - Coast Rosemary**

*Westringia* is also in the ‘top ten’ list in [Native Bees of the Sydney Region – A Field Guide](#). It flowers over a long period and is tough and reliable.

