

Welcome Summer!

As an urban beekeeper in the City of North Vancouver, I am often asked by gardeners what they can plant to attract beneficial insects, mainly pollinators. The more pollinators frequenting your yard will increase the yields on fruit trees and veggie gardens that you may already be growing. Unfortunately, in the last few years our native and domesticated bee populations have been declining. They are threatened by habitat loss, disease, and pesticide use. Luckily, choice plantings can help immensely.

Butterflies, bumble bees, honey bees, and ladybugs are just a few beneficial insects that may be attracted to the plantings in your yard. British Columbia has over 400 types of native bees, including the well-known mason bee. Now before you get squeamish and say I don't know if I want those 'bugs' in my yard, won't I get stung? The answer is, not likely. The beneficial insects that are attracted to your yard are focused on working. Going from flower to flower, gathering nectar, and pollinating as they go along. You may start noticing that different bees work different plants. Bumblebees will love your tomatoes, very small native mason bees will be on the mint and honey bees are all over the lavender. This is due to their tongue size and how the different plants flowers are shaped. Keep in mind, the insects that bother you at your picnic table are the wasps and hornets. They are the carnivores and are after your hamburger!

We're lucky enough to live in a place with a long, and even annual, growing season. Here are some of my favorites that do well in our climate. Many of the plants I recommend are not just attractive but useful. Herbs are a wonderful addition, not just attractive but edible too.

Edibles: Go ahead, hum the tune Parsley, Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme! Then add in mint, lavender, basil, marjoram, lemon balm, and fennel. If you allow some of your kale and lettuce to go to seed not only will you feed the bees but the flowers are an edible and zingy delight on your salad.

Berries: Blueberries and Raspberries

Fruit trees: Apple, cherry, and plums

Pretty: Borage, heather, lavender, sunflowers, bee balm (bergamot), poppies, wooly lambs ear, catnip, and crocus

Some of the earliest forage for the bees are your dandelions. You can tell your neighbours you're leaving them to save the bees!

Lianne is an urban beekeeper passionate about the urban agriculture movement. Her business, Two Bees Apiary, sells beekeeping equipment, supplies and glassware. For more information please visit www.twobeesapiary.com or email her at twobeesapiary@shaw.ca