



## Pleasant Hill Instructional Garden (PHIG) Living Landscape: A California Habitats Garden

<http://phig.webs.com> – email: [phigarden@gmail.com](mailto:phigarden@gmail.com)

P.O. Box 23454, Pleasant Hill, CA. 94523; Voicemail (925) 482-6670

Located At Pleasant Hill Education Center, 1 Santa Barbara Road, Pleasant Hill

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### Providing for Native Bees

It is estimated that 80% of the world's 250,000 flowering plants rely upon pollinating insects for healthy reproduction. Bees are some of the most effective pollinators in their ability to collect pollen. Particularly with the 60% decline in the population of European honey bees, native bees are essential for pollination to take place. Native bees have equally important roles in gardens and natural ecosystems as honey bees. You may have heard that very one in three bites of food we take is directly or indirectly attributed to the role bees play in the food web.

There are approximately 4,000 species of native bees in North America of which there are 1,500 species in California alone and at least 40-50 or more varieties of bees in your community. Since they are usually solitary, often native bees go unnoticed in the garden. Frequently small, with the exception of the carpenter bee or the bumble bee, bees can be mistaken for other insects such as flies or wasps. The male bee cannot sting and the female rarely stings.

Provide food, water, shelter, and nesting areas for these important pollinators in your garden and community. Plant a variety of bee-friendly plants that will bloom throughout several seasons in large groupings or swaths to attract more bees to your garden. Include native plants for their habitat value.

70- 85% of native bees nest in open earth rather than in trees or wooden blocks. Leave unmulched areas, which could be edges of paths or near fences, for them.

"Bee Houses" provide cover and places to raise young for other native bees. They're easy and fun to make (*see directions below*), or can be purchased commercially from several vendors. Using bamboo or other hollow stemmed plants tied together with one end open can also serve as nesting areas.

Be cautious and do not use insecticides around any bees and especially during open bloom. Use only products that are recommended and during times that the bees will not suffer.

For more information on native bees, visit U.C. Berkeley's Urban Bee Farm. For plant lists and other resources visit their web site: <http://nature.berkeley.edu/urbanbeegardens/> or contact the Xerces Society [www.xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center](http://www.xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center). Through the California Pollinator Project, which provides identification of native bees, you may become part of the citizen scientist pollinator monitoring program. They also sponsor a bee counting project from April through October called the Great Sunflower Project. ([www.greatsunflower.org](http://www.greatsunflower.org))

Contact us to become a part of PHIG's action this year with Sustainable Contra Costa to provide more bee houses, reduce pesticide use, and to create a pollinator corridor in our community. We initiated this project on Earth Day during our Open House event. Bee houses were also available at Wild Birds

**Donations gladly accepted. PHIG is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.**



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Unlimited in Pleasant Hill at our booth during their Mother's Day event. Below are instructions on how to build your own.

Providing cover for bees is a great way to qualify your yard as a National Wildlife Federation [Certified Wildlife Habitat site](#). More tips and information are available on their web site: <http://www.nwf.org>.

### **Native Bee House Instructions**

The orchard or mason bee is a wonderful little creature. It does not live in a colony like honey bees; it lives in wooden blocks, but it does not drill holes and destroy wooden items like the carpenter bee. It uses holes or nests that are already available.

With drill bits of various sizes (5/16th of an inch works best for mason bees) simply take some untreated scrap lumber and drill holes 3 to 5 inches deep, but not all the way through the wood block. For example, get a 4 inch by 4 inch piece of wood and drill holes that are 3 and 1/2 inches deep.

- You can cover the holes with chicken wire to help keep birds away from the bee house.
- Securely place the bee house on the north side of buildings, fence posts, or trees, about 3-4 feet from ground level between March to May.

Scatter some of the houses throughout your community to build a pollinator corridor. You may find an excellent location to trap some bees and then move them to your location.

- DO **NOT** move bee houses after they are in place until at least November.
- DO **NOT** spray insecticides on or around bee houses.
- If you choose to build your own bee houses, DO NOT use treated wood.

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