

There are over 250 kinds of bees in Britain. Some like the social bumble and honey bee are well known, others such as the solitary leaf-cutting, masonry and mining bee less so. But they are all useful insects, feeding on garden pests/ debris and pollinating flowers.

Bees can be easily mistaken for wasps. Both have black and yellow bands around their body's; less vivid in bees. Bees are hairier than wasps and you may be able to see little yellow pollen sacks on their hind limbs.

#### **Social bees:**

##### ***Bumble bees:***

Large, rounded and hairy, Bumble bees have wide black and yellow/ rusty orange banded body's. They often produce a deep buzzing sound.

They start to appear in spring when the queen emerges from hibernation and begins to feed on nectar and pollen. She will search out a nest site, typically made of grass, and start to lay eggs. Common sites are compost heaps, thick tufts of grass, piles of wood, disused bird/ mouse nests or under garden sheds/ buildings. Nests usually never total more than a few hundred bees, often quite a lot less.

Come late summer/ early autumn the nest will die out, leaving only the queen who will abandon the site and hibernate till the following spring.

Bumble bees are harmless and will only become agitated if the nest or its entrance is disturbed. They do not swarm.

Classed as endangered, Bumble bees are legally protected. Anyone found to be deliberately killing them could be fined up to £25,000 in a magistrate's court.

##### ***Honey bees:***

Smaller than the bumble bee, they are black and brownish yellow in colour. This is the species kept by man in hives from which honey and wax are collected.

Honey bees are extremely social, living in a colony of up to 50,000 individuals within a hive or 'honey comb'. A colony consists of 3 castes of bee; one queen who lays the eggs, some hundred male fertile drones and thousands of developed and undeveloped sterile female worker bees. The workers collect and produce food, protect the hive, feed and care for the queen and larvae (babies).

Honey bees become active in the spring when workers begin to search out and collect nectar and pollen.

Colonies are long lasting and may survive for many years. This is possible because Honey bees store food reserves and huddle together during the winter months. The drones are turned out of the nest in autumn to die since their reproductive role is over.

The Honey bee is the only bee in this country that swarms. This happens when a colony with more than one queen bee splits. One queen leaves the hive together with several thousand workers, forming a dense mass, to find a suitable site and create a new colony. Swarming occurs between mid April and early August, usually on a bright sunny morning with little or no wind. If a swarm settles in a reasonably accessible area, it may be possible for a beekeeper to remove the swarm without too much difficulty. It is almost impossible to remove bees from a cavity or chimney if they have been there for more than two or three days, as they will have started to build a 'comb' and establish themselves.

## Solitary bees:

Solitary bees are to be found in many gardens during spring and summer but go largely unobserved. Common species include the leaf-cutting, masonry and mining bee. They look similar to honey bees, but tend to be slightly larger and slower in their movements.

These species make small holes in the soft mortar joints of brickwork, airbrick and garden canes to create homes and nest sites for their eggs.

They appear in April when the weather warms up and the eggs, which are laid the previous spring, hatch. The adults survive about 6-8 weeks; during this time they lay their egg/s, in the hole from which they emerged, for next year's bees.

Most species of solitary bee are not capable of stinging and those that can are unable to penetrate human skin. Left alone they will not usually cause any harm.

There is no treatment to remove solitary bees from their holes and it is illegal to use poison. To try and stop them reappearing next year, the holes in

mortar could be repointed after the adult bee emerges.

**Please note:** The Council does not provide a service to remove or treat bees. Please see the Hertfordshire Beekeepers Association website, [www.hertsbees.org.uk](http://www.hertsbees.org.uk), or contact our preferred contractor SDK Environmental Limited on 01753 538819 for further advice.

# Bees

## Fact sheet

