

THE BOOTH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Bumble Bees in the Garden

It is great to have bumblebees in your garden. They are delightful insects, friendlier than honeybees and only likely to sting if really severely molested or roughly handled. A lot of their buzzing when disturbed is bluff. If you are lucky there will be a nest in your garden, something many people do not realise they. They do not 'swarm' like honeybees, nor attack like wasps.



Bumblebee colonies only last one season, starting in the spring when a queen, who has hibernated over winter, emerges and sets up a new nest. She finds a suitable site which in a garden could be in or under the garden shed, behind some stacked timber, amongst tussocky plants, a hole in the ground, in old mouse nest or even in an unoccupied bird box. She lays eggs that hatch and develop into workers that take care of the nest, defending it and collecting food. Later in the year eggs are laid that develop into males and immature queens who leave the nest and mate. The males die and the now fertile females – the queens – find somewhere to sleep through the winter. As autumn approaches, around September-October the workers die and founding queen

die and the nest falls into disrepair.

Bumblebees are important pollinators of garden and crops and vegetable. They have longer tongues than other bees so can pollinate plants with deep flowers. 25 different kinds in Britain each with its own special capabilities.

What can I do if I have a nest?

Bumblebees only get irritated if you start interfering with their nest. They do not mind you passing by their nest, wasps or honeybees that will actively leave the nest off. However, they might get aggravated if you



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with it and do their own thing. Even the very largest nests produce very little 'traffic' in and out, so you will not see threatening numbers of bees at any point during the summer, just ones and twos going to-and-fro. Children and pets are quite safe.



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There are bees in my shed. If this is the case they are probably living under the shed, and are coming up through holes in the floor, then this is probably because it is the easiest way in and out for them. If you make a different hole, from the outside of the shed, and then block up the hole they were using, then they should happily take to their new route.

I want to move/remove a bumblebee nest - how should I do it?

As mentioned above, bumblebees are not at all aggressive, seldom sting, and are very easy to live with. Above all – do not resort to killing them. Only try to move nests that are in a particularly inconvenient location. Underground nests will be more difficult to move, as you will create a

considerable amount of disturbance as you dig down to the nest. However, if it is outside and underground then there should be no reason to move it.

To move a nest safely it is best to do it in the dark – when all of the bees will be at home and 'asleep'. Bumblebees are harder workers than honeybees and will start very early in the morning and continue to late into the evening. Before doing anything get a box, a shoebox is ideal unless the nest is very big, to hand. Put dry grass or dry moss in the bottom of the box to rest the nest upon. Make a 2cm hole in the side, and cover it over with sticky tape of some kind or make a bung from dried grass. Wear long sleeves and or gardens gloves, and do not shine the torch, if you are using one, directly at the bees as they might fly towards it.

If underground use a spade to carefully dig around the nest, not disturbing it, then carefully dig beneath it so you can pick up the entire nest. Or if the nest is amongst vegetation pick it up or use a spade. They might buzz a bit but they will not fly in the dark, so you can do it reasonably safely. Pop the nest in the box, and shut the lid. Try to keep the nest upright, otherwise their honey pots will spill. Put the nest somewhere sheltered and out of direct sunlight with a piece of board or something waterproof over the top to keep the rain out.

Once you have moved them, and the bees have settled down, remove the tape/bung. The bees might take a little while to adjust, but they should take to their new home pretty well.

There, they are now re-homed and out of your way.



You can also make or buy ready-made bumblebee nest boxes so that you can encourage these amazing little insects to live in your garden. Other species of, solitary bee can also be encouraged to nest in your garden. Nests for these can be bought or made from straws, tubes, hollow bamboo pieces etc.

