Honeybee vs. Native Bee Basics

Honeybee on yellow-petaled flower

Bees are a fascinating topic to which I have not had much exposure. Growing up in Pennsylvania, I only encountered stinging bees. Recently, I decided to learn more about the various bees found in Virginia. Jay Houk visited my Master Gardener Intern class, where he taught us about various bees, wasps, and yellow jackets. Did you know bees are usually calm and do not attack unless they are stood on, feel threatened, or are crushed by hand? Jay explained that bees perceive us as trees if we remain still and don't flail our arms.

Honey Bees on Honeycomb

Jay also shared some interesting facts about bees that I found fascinating:

- Virginia is home to 477 species of native and solitary bees, belonging to six families, more than 10% of the more than over 4,000 native bee species in the United States.
- Although the honeybee is the most well-known, it is not native to Virginia. It was brought to Jamestown during Colonial times in 1622.
- Honeybees live together in large well-organized family groups called hives, which can house tens of thousands of bees.
- Within a hive are three social castes: queen, worker, and drone. Members of each caste have clearly defined roles that contribute to the hive's functionality.
- Due to their large numbers, honeybees are preferred for commercial farm pollination, but native and solitary bees provide significant crop and garden pollination on their own.
- Native and solitary bees include carpenter bees, bumble bees, and leafcutter bees.

World Honey Bee Day is celebrated every third Saturday in August. It is a holiday that reminds us of the beauty and value of bees. Celebrate National Honey Bee Day on August 21!

If you're interested in learning more about bees in Virginia, please see these resources to get started.

Photos: images.

1. https://www.wallpaperflare.com/micro-photo-of-honey-bee-perched-on-yellow-petaled-flower-wallpaper-58216
2. Sensors%20-%20libelium.com.%20(n.d.).%20https:/www.libelium.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ST-15-2015-Libellium_Case_Study.pdf

Resources

Virginia Tech certified Bee Campus - https://www.vt.edu/sustainability/engagement/bee-campus-usa.html

Planting pollinator-friendly gardens. Penn State Extension. (n.d.). https://extension.psu.edu/planting-pollinator-friendly-gardens

Native and Solitary Bees of Virginia - https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ENTO/ENTO-151/ENTO-151.html

Bees of Virginia. (n.d.-a). https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/document/vainvertlist-bees.pdf

U.S. Department of the Interior. (n.d.). *Pollinators (U.S. National Park Service)*. National Parks Service. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/pollinators/index.htm