

Bumble Bees of the Eastern United States

Twenty-one species of bumble bees (*Bombus* spp.) occur east of the 100th meridian. Within the genus *Bombus*, individuals vary dramatically within a species in color pattern, extent and intensity of colors on the head, thorax and abdomen. A representative color pattern is shown for each species. Facial shape is not pictured, but is a key component in accurate identification. Please refer to the depictions of color pattern and face shape in our published field guide, *Bumble Bees of the Eastern United States*, available at www.pollinator.org/books/htm and at www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/documents/BumbleBeeGuide.

To complicate matters further, bumble bees often mimic one another in color patterns, so they can be difficult to distinguish from one another especially on the wing as they go from flower to flower in

your garden. The sizes of the bees on the poster are relative. The size of adult bumble bees is entirely dependent upon the amount of food they ate as larvae. Thus, even within the same colony of a species you can find tiny to very large workers, some of them approaching the size of the colony's queen.

There are 47 bumble bee species in the entire United States and they are among our most important pollinators. These charismatic bees visit flowers with long corollas and abundant nectar. Bumble bees are important as commercial pollinators of tomatoes, along with certain wildflowers, which they buzz pollinate, turning themselves into living tuning forks to harvest their pollen grains. At least 6 species in the U.S. are in trouble. Visit www.pollinator.org for more information and to see how you can help.



Brown-belted bumble bee
B. griseocollis

Common; visits milkweeds, thistles, sunflowers.

Tri-colored bumble bee
B. ternarius

Common; found on milkweeds, goldenrods, blueberries.

Red-belted bumble bee
B. rufocinctus

Common; feeds on sweet clover, thistles, asters.

Black and gold bumble bee
B. auricomus

Uncommon; visits bee balm and nightshades.

Lemon cuckoo bumble bee
B. citrinus

Widespread; parasitizes *B. impatiens*, *B. vagans*.

Two-spotted bumble bee
B. bimaculatus

Common; found on thistles and clovers.

Common eastern bumble bee
B. impatiens

Common; a commercial pollinator of greenhouse tomatoes.

Frigid bumble bee
B. frigidus

Rare, northern only; found on thistles, dandelion.

Yellow-banded bumble bee
B. terricola

Uncommon; visits willows, honeysuckles, asters.

Indiscriminate cuckoo bumble bee
B. insularis

Rare; visits goldenrods, clovers.

Ashton cuckoo bumble bee
B. ashtoni

Rare, in decline; parasitizes *B. affinis*, *B. terricola*.

American bumble bee
B. pensylvanicus

Uncommon, possibly in decline; visits vetches, goldenrods, clovers.

Fernald cuckoo bumble bee
B. fernaldae

Uncommon; parasitizes *B. perplexus*, *B. rufocinctus*.

Rusty-patched bumble bee
B. affinis

Rare, in decline; visits sunflowers, goldenrods.

Confusing bumble bee
B. perplexus

Common; found on St. John's Wort, honeysuckles.

Sanderson bumble bee
B. sandersoni

Uncommon; visits bee balms, beard tongues, apples.

Yellow bumble bee
B. fervidus

Uncommon; possibly in decline, seen on honeysuckles, thistles.

Northern amber bumble bee
B. borealis

Uncommon; visits vetches, thistles, aster, comfrey.

Variable cuckoo bumble bee
B. variabilis

Rare; possibly extinct, parasitizes *B. pensylvanicus*.

Half-black bumble bee
B. vagans

Common; seen on milkweeds, meadowsweet.

Southern plains bumble bee
B. fraternus

Uncommon; feeds on St. John's Wort, bee balm, nightshades.



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