



SAVING THE BEES, ONE BACKYARD AT A TIME

Laurence Packer's garden isn't like most in his downtown Toronto neighbourhood. Where manicured grass and tilled earth normally reign supreme, the world-renowned bee researcher leaves patches of dry earth and old raspberry canes. Vines blanket an old wooden arbour, and an assortment of wide, colourful blooms abound, scattered throughout a great green sea of shrubs and chives.

"It's not your typical garden," Packer concedes. He estimates it contains at least 35 different bee species, setting an impressive example for OPG's latest partnership: the Let it Bee campaign.

Let it Bee mobilizes businesses and gardeners alike to create new urban homes for Ontario's beleaguered bees. Caught between climate change and the widespread use of neonicotinoid pesticides, members of more than 400 species living in the province are dying by the millions. It's a situation that has human consequences - pollinators like bees are responsible for about two thirds of what we eat.

That's what makes Let it Bee so important. OPG has partnered with Friends of the Earth Canada - the Canadian branch of the world's largest environmental organization - to mobilize businesses and gardeners and create new bee habitat in our cities. Launched on May 18, it's the largest public outreach campaign in FOE's 40-year history.

"OPG has a long history of biodiversity protection and education. We invest in habitat protection and restoration at all of our sites and in strategic locations across Ontario," says Jeff Lyash, OPG's President and CEO. "Our new partnership with Friends of the Earth Canada is a natural fit, particularly since they are championing one of nature's smallest but most valuable workers - the native bee."

Let it Bee encourages gardeners and businesses to give their yards a Packer-style makeover - in essence, to take a step back and let some things "bee." According to J. Scott MacIvor, a postdoctoral bee researcher at the University of Toronto, creating a bee haven usually amounts to less work for homeowners. He encourages gardeners to leave old wood and raspberry canes as nesting sites, and to stop using pesticides and mulching their gardens.

Above all, he tells people to learn about Ontario's bees and spread the buzz. "Talk to your neighbours," he urges. "We can create a haven for wild bees, and this has been shown all over the world."

While creating a thriving, buzzing bee haven can sound intimidating, about half of Ontario's bees actually don't actually sting. Social species like hornets, honeybees and paper wasps are the common culprits, but gardeners looking to create backyard havens for Ontario's wild, largely-solitary bees have nothing to fear.

Each species is crucially important. Fruit pollinated by multiple species tastes better, and the plants produce more seeds. Packer says the bees in his garden greatly boost his vegetable yield, leaving him with too much produce to eat. "I have to take tomatoes in by the backpackful to give to students!" he exclaims.

The tomatoes are bountiful, but Packer believes the bees themselves are the real treat. "They're agricultural, and they're beautiful," he says.



TIPS FOR TURNING YOUR GARDEN INTO A *Bee & Bee*

- Leave exposed wood, stalks and raspberry canes as nesting sites. If you have to prune, leave about a foot of cane at ground level, and consider using the cut stalks for a border or arbour.
- Create south-facing bee habitat. The bees wake up with the sun's warmth, and will enjoy the added advantage.
- Avoid pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

