

What Do Honey Bees Eat?

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Quick Answer

Honey bees eat nectar and pollen from flowers. Nectar gives bees sugar for energy, while pollen gives them protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals. Honey bees also eat stored honey, and young bees receive special food made by worker bees.

Why Do Bees Need Nectar and Pollen?

Nectar and pollen do different jobs in a bee's diet:

- **Nectar provides energy.** Bees use its sugar to fly, work, and keep the colony warm.
- **Pollen helps bees grow.** It provides protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals.
- **A mix of flowers supports better health.** Different kinds of pollen provide different nutrients.

Native bees and honey bees both depend on flowers for nectar and pollen. A garden with many kinds of flowers can provide food from spring through fall.

Do Bees Eat Honey?

Yes. Honey bees eat honey when fresh nectar is hard to find, especially at night, during bad weather, and through winter. They make honey by changing nectar and storing it in wax cells.

A strong colony needs enough stored honey to survive cold months. Learn more in [How Do You Winterize a Beehive?](#)

What Do Baby Bees Eat?

Baby bees are called larvae. Worker bees feed young larvae a rich food called royal jelly. Worker and drone larvae later receive food that includes pollen and nectar, while a future queen receives much more royal jelly.

See [What Is Bee Brood?](#) to learn what bee eggs, larvae, and capped brood look like.

What Does a Queen Bee Eat?

Worker bees feed the queen royal jelly. This rich food helps her stay healthy and lay eggs. The queen does not leave the hive to gather her own food.

Food alone does not prove that a queen is healthy. Look for a steady brood pattern and other signs listed in [How Can I Tell if My Queen Is Healthy?](#)

Do Bees Drink Water?

Yes. Bees collect water to drink, cool the hive, and help care for the colony. Water is not food, but bees still need a clean and safe water source.

Place shallow water near a hive and give bees stones, corks, or another dry place to land. Refresh the water often so it does not become dirty or attract mosquitoes.

When Should Beekeepers Feed Honey Bees?

Feed a managed colony when it does not have enough natural food or stored honey. New colonies, light hives, and colonies facing a gap in blooming flowers may need help.

- Use sugar syrup when bees need quick energy and the weather is warm enough for liquid feed.
- Use fondant or another dry sugar feed when cold weather makes syrup a poor choice.
- Use a pollen patty when the colony needs protein for raising brood.

Do not use feeding as a substitute for checking hive health. During an inspection, look at food stores, brood, the queen, pests, and the size of the colony. Review [What Should I Look for When Inspecting My Beehive?](#) before you open the hive.

For recipes and placement tips, use the [USU Extension Bee Nutrition and Feeding guide](#).

How Can I Help Bees Find Enough Food?

- Grow several kinds of flowers that bloom at different times.
- Choose plants that provide pollen and nectar.
- Avoid spraying open flowers when bees are visiting them.

- Provide clean, shallow water with safe landing spots.

See the [USU Extension Pollinator Friendly Plants guide](#) for ideas.

References

- [USU Extension Bee Nutrition and Feeding](#)
- [USU Extension Pollinator Friendly Plants](#)
- [USU Extension Beginner's Guide to Common Native Bees](#)
- [USU Extension Factors Contributing to Bee Decline](#)

Adapted from USU Extension beekeeping and honey bee biology resources.

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