

Bumble bees!

Have you seen any big, fuzzy bees flying around lately? You probably saw a bumble bee! Minnesota has 23 of the 45 species of bumble bees known in North America. Today you'll search for bumble bees, learn a bit about them, and try to identify a male and female bumble bee.

Bumble bees are usually **large** and **fuzzy**, with lots of hair. Their bodies are usually **black and yellow**, though some species also have orange and red coloring. I sent your parents some websites that might help you identify them.



A female bumble bee collecting pollen from Partridge Pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*)

Can you spot any bumble bees in your yard?

They love to visit flowers. You may be able to find them hanging out on your Partridge Pea in your Backyard Science bed, especially in the morning. If you don't have any Partridge Pea this year, look on other flowers in your yard!

Bumble bees live in colonies of usually a few hundred bees. Each colony has a **queen bee** and lots of female **worker bees** and male **drone bees**. The **workers collect pollen and nectar** from flowers to feed the baby bumble bees back in the colony. The drones visit flowers to drink nectar, but it's only to feed themselves — they don't contribute to baby bee care! The drones' main activity is mating with queen bees to produce more baby bumble bees.

The female workers have a **pollen basket** (corbicula) on each of their back legs. These baskets, which are a flat section of leg surrounded by spiky hairs, allow the workers to harvest loads of pollen to then take back to the colony! This also makes it easy to ID female worker bees, like the one above, because male drones do not have these baskets.

Can you find a female (worker) and male (drone) bumble bee?