Alkali bees, like leafcutter bees, pollinate alfalfa flowers to make alfalfa seed. These bees nest in the ground and are very picky; they love salty, moist and crumbly soil. Some farmers have figured out how to create these same conditions in the soil on their farms. At these sites, thousands of females build nests side-by-side, packing their nests with alfalfa pollen. After the females lay an egg, the hungry alkali bee larvae consume the pollen and complete their development underground.

Color this page online and more at: FoodHero.org/bees
Bumble bees are important pollinators of many wild and agricultural plants (plants grown by farmers). Some of the crops they pollinate include cranberries and other berries, apples, tomatoes, peppers and squash. They are large and fuzzy bees, and their bodies are most often colored with a mixture of black, yellow, orange, brown or white hairs. In Oregon they are important pollinators of red clover. Oregon is one of the largest growers of clover seed in the world. Farmers buy the seed to grow clover plants, which are fed to cows and other livestock (animals raised on a farm) that give us milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, meat and more.

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Cuckoo bees don’t forage for pollen. They have found a way to steal it. When a Nomada female reproduces (has babies), she looks for a nest that is being built by a female bee closely related to her. Once she finds a nest, she waits for the female bee who made it to go forage. Then she sneaks inside and quickly lays her own eggs, right next to some of the other bee’s eggs. Each of her eggs will hatch into a larva (the early stage of a bee that looks like a caterpillar), destroy the offspring of the other female and eat pollen left by the female who made the nest. Cuckoo bees got their name from cuckoo birds, which lay their eggs in other birds’ nests.

Field Notes:

Cuckoo bees often look more like wasps than bees. They can be red, yellow, brown or black and often have spines and ridges on their bodies.

Genus: Nomada
(pronounced no-MA-da)

Cuckoo bees have evolved over time without any pollen-carrying structure. Since they steal their pollen, they don’t need to carry it on their body.

Not all bees are pollinators or help make food. Cuckoo bees are kleptoparasites. Klepto means “to steal” and a parasite is a living creature that feeds off another living creature.
Honey bees are pollinators of agricultural crops worldwide. That’s because they pollinate many different types of plants (some other bee species are very picky eaters), and they are easy to manage. For hundreds of years, beekeepers have known how to raise them in portable nests that they can move from field to field. Honey bees make tasty honey, too, which is how they got their name. They are medium-sized bees that range in color from black to pale yellow. Colonizing Europeans brought honey bees to North America starting in the 1620s. In Oregon, they are one of the only pollinators of carrots, which Oregon farmers mainly grow not for the vegetable, but for the seeds produced by carrot flowers.

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Leafcutter bees are pollinators of alfalfa and many wild plants. They are called leafcutter bees because they cut out small pieces of leaves to use to build their nests. Leafcutter bees are darkly colored, small to medium-sized bees. In Oregon, they are important pollinators of alfalfa grown for seed. Farmers buy the seed to grow alfalfa plants, which are fed to cows and other livestock (animals raised on a farm) that give us milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, meat and more.

Field Notes:

Leafcutter bees are pollinators of alfalfa and many wild plants. They are called leafcutter bees because they cut out small pieces of leaves to use to build their nests. Leafcutter bees are darkly colored, small to medium-sized bees. In Oregon, they are important pollinators of alfalfa grown for seed. Farmers buy the seed to grow alfalfa plants, which are fed to cows and other livestock (animals raised on a farm) that give us milk, cheese, yogurt, eggs, meat and more.

Color this page online and more at: FoodHero.org/bees
Long-horned bees are beautiful medium-sized bees that are very fuzzy. They are dark with yellow, black or white hairs. Males have long antennae (horns) like the bee shown. Females have large, brush-like hairs on their back legs that they use to carry pollen: corbicula and scopal hair on legs and abdomen.

Only female bees collect pollen. Male bees of all species lack structures to carry pollen: corbicula and scopal hair on legs and abdomen.

This is a male long-horned bee (you can tell because of the long antennae). Females have shorter antennae.

Long-horned bees are beautiful medium-sized bees that are very fuzzy. They are dark with yellow, black or white hairs. Males have long antennae (horns) like the bee shown. Females have large, brush-like hairs on their back legs that they use to carry pollen. Bees in the genus Melissodes like to visit plants in the sunflower family the most. They also visit a number of native plants. Planting sunflowers in your community, and watching the blooms, is the best way to find these bees in Oregon.

Find the hidden pictures!
Some mason bees are pollinators of almonds, apples, blueberries, raspberries and cherries, as well as many wild plants. They are called mason bees because they use mud or clay to build their nests, just like a mason. A mason is someone who uses bricks and mortar to build homes and other buildings. They are small to medium-sized bees that are colored in bright metallic blues and greens and sometimes black. In Oregon, they are most often used to pollinate cherries. They work quickly: under some conditions one female mason bee can pollinate three times as many flowers as a single honey bee in the same amount of time.

Field Notes:

Genus: Osmia
(pronounced OZ-me-a)

6 to 12 mm in length

A trait of this bee is that it is a fast pollinator.

Synonyms for fast include:
- quick
- rapid
- speedy

Pollen comes in all the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. It can even be white!

Mason bees carry pollen on special hairs on their abdomen.

Photograph by Steve Peterson

Find the hidden pictures!
Squash bees found in Oregon are medium-sized, fuzzy bees that feed only on the pollen of plants in the squash family (squashes, pumpkins, and gourds). They spend their whole lives around the plants they pollinate. They nest in the ground beneath squash plants and even sleep inside squash blossoms. In fact, the best way to find squash bees is by looking inside squash blossoms in the cool of the morning when the bees are still asleep. Squash bees are new to Oregon and are still making their way around. Can you find squash bees in your community?

Color this page online and more at: FoodHero.org/bees
Green Metallic Sweat Bees

Genus: Agapostemon
(pronounced a-ga-POSS-ta-mon)

Green metallic sweat bees pollinate the flowers of many cultivated plants (plants grown on purpose) as well as many wildflowers. Sweat bees have been given this name because they lick the sweat of mammals as a way to add salt to their diet. They are medium-sized and have a bright metallic green color. These bees love open and flat-shaped flowers such as daisies, dandelions, wild roses, and blackberry and apple blossoms. They love purple asters, a plant grown by many Oregon nurseries (places where plants are grown on purpose).

Growing flowers in your community helps the bees that make your food.

Field Notes:

A trait of the bee is that it is bright in color. Synonyms for bright include:
- sparkling
- glittering
- radiant