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Bumble bees are one of the most recognizable and important pollinating insects in the world. The dense, fuzzy hair that covers their bodies as well as their unmistakable, helicopter-like buzz makes them a delight to observe. Wisconsin is home to 20 of the 250 known species of bumble bee. This guide will help you identify the 10 most important bumble bees in Wisconsin in addition to sharing some of the most important and fascinating biology about these lovely creatures.

Bumble bee life cycle

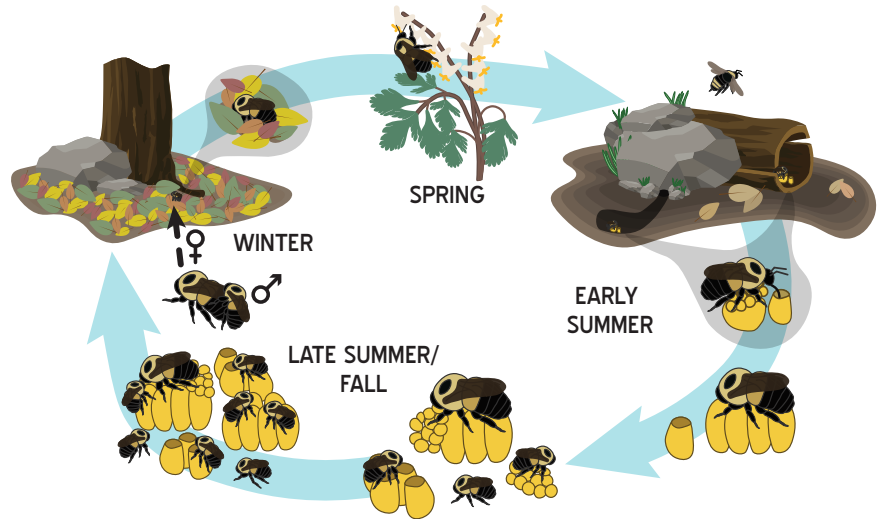
Bumble bees, like honey bees, are social insects - living together in a colony.

Spring: Queen emerges and locates nest, raises first round of female workers.

Early Summer: Queen stays inside laying eggs, workers forage for pollen and nectar.

Late Summer: Males and new queens emerge and mate. All but new queens die.

Fall/Winter: Newly mated queens dig underground to hibernate until spring.



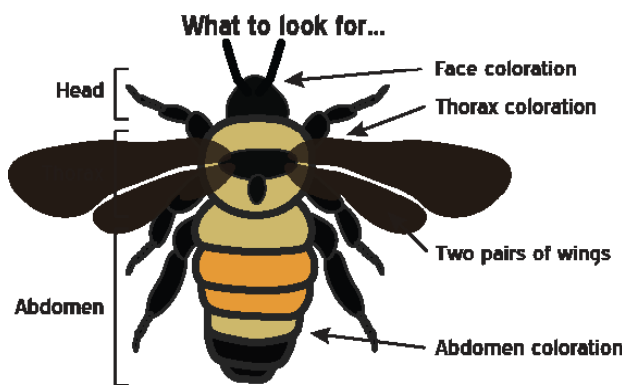
The endangered bumble bee

In March of 2017, the rusty-patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) became the first federally protected bumble bee species. This once common bee has all but disappeared over 90% of its range and is now rarely encountered.

Habitat loss, disease, and increased insecticide use are all thought to be reasons for the decline of rusty-patched and several other once common species. A few small sanctuaries (such as UW Arboretum) still host the rusty-patch. Other species, including *Bombus terricola*, are also in decline.

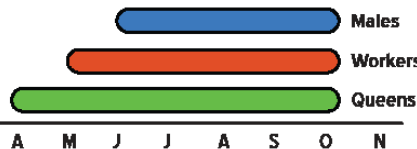


Using this guide



Other information in the guide includes...

Activity period over the year



Approximate range



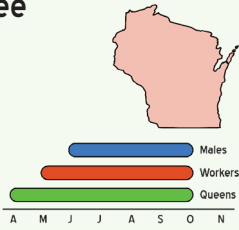
Bee Size



10 IMPORTANT WISCONSIN BUMBLE BEES

Common eastern bumble bee

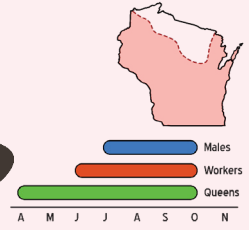
Bombus impatiens



The most common species: easily recognizable with only the first abdominal segment being yellow.

Rusty-patched bumble bee

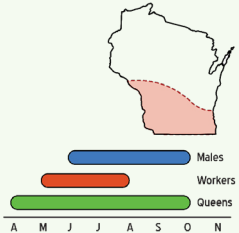
Bombus affinis



Endangered - PLEASE REPORT SIGHTINGS Brown/orange patch completely surrounded by yellow.

Two-spotted bumble bee

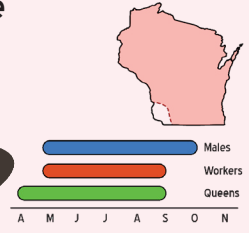
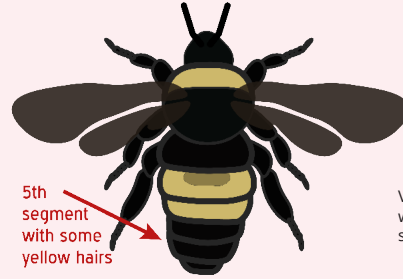
Bombus bimaculatus



Common species in southern WI with two yellow spots on the second abdominal segment.

Yellow-banded bumble bee

Bombus terricola



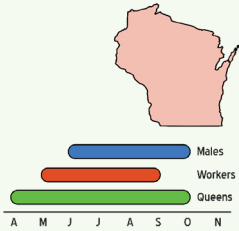
Very rare/declining. Yellow band with darker patch on first yellow segment. Rear half of thorax black.

ENDANGERED/RARE SPECIES

COMMON SPECIES

Half-black bumble bee

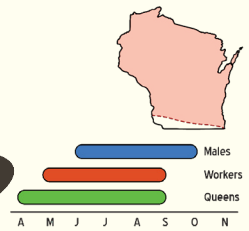
Bombus vagans



Widely distributed species with first two abdominal segments yellow, black spot between wings.

Tri-colored bumble bee

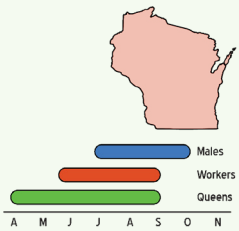
Bombus ternarius



Large bees with two bright orange abdominal segments and a black "T" between wings.

Brown-belted bumble bee

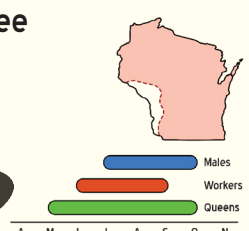
Bombus griseocollis



Common. Second abdominal segment with some-all brown, thorax mostly yellow.

Northern amber bumble bee

Bombus borealis

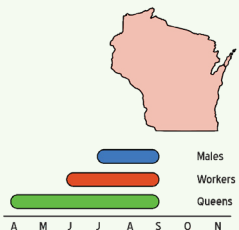


Less common. Mostly amber-yellow abdomen with black tip, black band between wings.

LESS COMMON SPECIES

Red-belted bumble bee

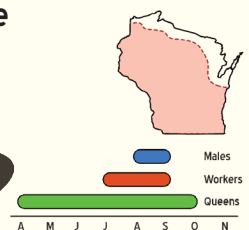
Bombus rufocinctus



Many color variations. Often with two yellow abdominal segments followed by two orange segments.

Black and gold bumble bee

Bombus auricomus



Uncommon. Large bees with first abdominal segment yellow/black, second and third yellow.

*Extremely variable color patterns

