

August Gardening Guide

Don't Tell Bees to Buzz Off

By Cynthia Brian

"I am weary of swords and courts and kings. Let us go into the garden and watch the minister's bees." — Mary Johnston



Passion Flower. Look closely at the intricacies of this beautiful specimen.

Photos Cynthia Brian

There is a symphony playing daily in my garden. While my husband turns on the stereo to listen to his favorite tunes, I merely open my door or window to hear the melodic concert of nature. My favorite musicians include the thousands of bees buzzing, hummingbirds bustling, birds singing, frogs croaking, water trickling, owls hooting and crickets chirping. Sometimes the hawks or turkey vultures swoop low with the sound of their flapping wings creating a "whoosh, whoosh" like a strong base. The orchestra changes by the minute as the pollinators search for nectar that produces one out of every three bites we consume.

This week as I was sitting on my porch putting on my boots, a hummingbird came to inspect the red mandevilla blooms next to me, then, rapidly moved to hover three inches from my nose for about 10 seconds. It was



Blackberries are big and juicy this year. Eat raw or make a simple blackberry tart.

a magical moment photographed in my mind.

With much of summer spent outdoors, I've had individuals tell me that they don't like to be in their gardens because of their fear of bee stings. Honeybees, bumble bees and other native bees are passive as they busily forage. They are not interested in humans and will only sting to defend themselves. With the thousands of bees serenading in my landscape, the only times I have been stung is when I've tried to rescue a bee from a swimming pool, fountain or other water feature. (Of course, if you are allergic to bees, it's always good to have an updated pen of epinephrine on hand.)

Yellow jackets are meat eaters. Although these black and yellow carnivorous creatures are also pollinators, they are mostly attracted to meat, fish, sugary substances, garbage, and, alas, our barbecues and picnics. Unlike bees that sting once and die, yellow jackets have the ability to sting repeatedly. If you have bees landing on your plates as you are enjoying a meal outdoors, you have an invasion of yellow jackets, not bees. Bees flock to flowers, yellow jackets to flesh. Find the nest and call Vector Control, (925) 685-9301, a countywide free service paid through our taxes to eradicate these pests. Yellow jackets are not music to our ears.

For the rest of the butterflies, moths, bees and musicians, cue the conductors and buzz on! Go into the garden to enjoy the show.

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