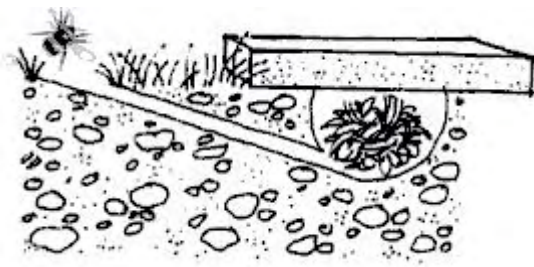


## Friendly insect's fact sheet 1

# Bumble Bees

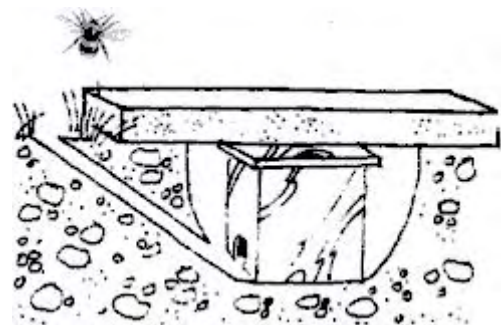
**Bumblebees are important in the pollination process**, particularly in the early season when honey bees are not active. Bumblebees can be encouraged to nest in your garden by the provision of 'artificial' nest sites - in which you can observe the workings of the bees. These are easily constructed. The plan shown in **Design 1** is a modification of an original design by F.W.L. Sladen - the Father of bumblebee research (1876-1921).



Design 1

The tunnel is made by placing a 20-25 mm tube through the soil. Plastic or copper pipe will do. Dig out a chamber where the pipe ends below the surface, cover this with a concrete slab. The soil must be well draining, otherwise the nest and its contents will start to decay. Remember, bumblebees usually make use of old mice or vole nests; they choose dry sites too, so look out for them and select a similar situation for your artificial nest site. Warmth is also essential.

This unlined 'hole in the ground' design of nesting chamber does work, but it can be improved by the additional of a small box. Construct a plywood box 100 x 100mm square and 200mm high with a lid that just rests on top. Position it at the bottom of the chamber with an entrance hole (near the base of the box) aligned to the tunnel (see **Design 2**). Such an arrangement is better insulated and offers more protection from damp.



Design 2

The fact that bumblebees quite frequently use bird boxes gives us a clue to another approach, using boxes of similar construction to that suggested above but with secure, hinged (observation) lids. The box, which must have its entrance hole near the bottom of its front face, should be half buried at the base of a hedge, preferably south facing or in a 'woodland edge' situation. A short length of plastic tubing, 25-30mm in diameter, should meet up with the entrance hole to give access to the 'des res'. Collect some fine dry grass for the nest itself with perhaps a little dried moss. Form it into a ball about 75mm across and place it in the nest chamber. The nest site should be made ready (ideally) by the beginning of May.

What you'll see if you lift the lid of an occupied box is workers arriving with food and departing to forage, having off-loaded it in the nest. You may also see some structural reorganisation in progress, but unless you are prepared to tease the nest ball apart a little (quite easily done) you won't see much else. However, watching the behaviour of the queen discovering the nest site and familiarising herself with the area in spring and the constant activity of the workers during the summer is very rewarding, and that can be done without removing the lid. Bumblebees are not easy to upset, so if you are patient and move slowly there is little chance of being stung - but do take care, especially if you are allergic to bee stings!



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