

# Creating Nesting & Overwintering Sites for Pollinators and other Beneficial Insects at Home

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<https://www.accentnaturale.com/flower-stalks-for-bee-nests/>



<https://sites.tufts.edu/pollinators/2021/04/the-right-way-to-leave-stems-for-native-bees/>

## Leave the Stems Behind

Hollow and pithy plants stems and branches serve as excellent habitat and overwintering sites for cavity-nesting insects like carpenter bees. Hollow stems also provide shelter for many other beneficial insects such as wasps, moths, and spiders.

Using a mix of shrubs and wildflowers is a great start to creating a stem habitat at your home. Shrubs such as elder berries and raspberries are great. Wildflowers like purple cone flower and black-eyed Susan. Swamp mallow hibiscus create beautiful large flowers throughout the summer and when they die back, create excellent hollow stems for insects.

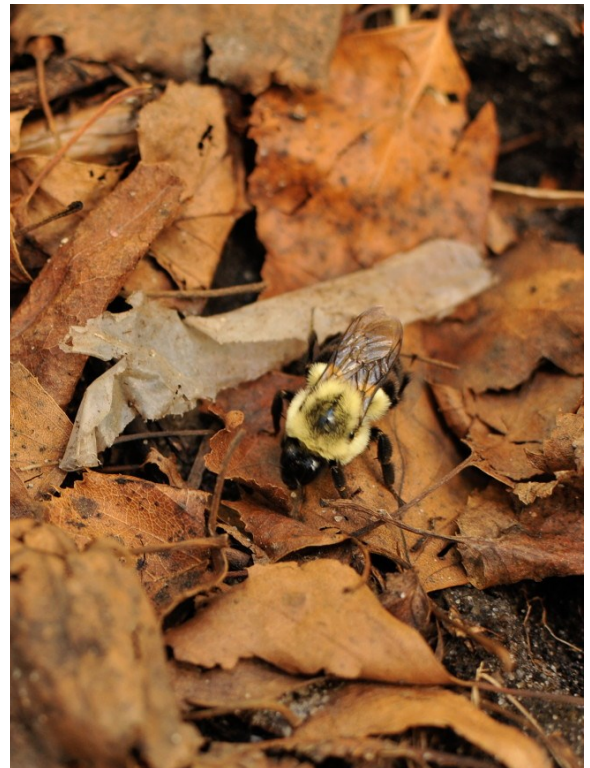
When plants die back in the fall, do not cut down dead stems at ground level. Stems should be cut to varying heights of 8-24” and left as the plants grow back in the spring.

## A layer of Leaves Goes a Long Way

Winters in New York can get very cold and because of that most butterflies and moths rely on leaf litter for protection of eggs, caterpillars, chrysalises, and adults. Leaves can also serve as a food source when caterpillars first emerge.

Ideally, a thin layer of leaves is spread throughout your lawn. All that's needed is about an inch or less of leaves. Leaving a thin layer of leaves has a positive impact on lawn health. Any more than 2 inches could be harmful to the lawn. If covering your lawn isn't an option for you. Some great alternatives are covering your flower and garden beds with leaves or piling leaves around trees and shrubs. Whole leaves are better than shredder leaves.

The best method is to leave the leaves year round but if you want to rake them up come spring time, wait until late spring. This gives the insects enough time to emerge from their winter dormancy.



<https://xerces.org/blog/where-do-pollinators-go-in-winter>

S. Foltz Jordan, J. Hopwood, & S. Morris. (2020) Nesting & Overwintering Habitat for Pollinators & Other Beneficial Insects. Xerces Society.



<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/ask-extension/featured/ground-bee-identification>

## An Imperfect Lawn is Perfect for Ground Nesters

About 70% of all native New York bees are ground nesting. The ground nesting bees prefer loose undisturbed soil in areas of patchy low density vegetation. Patchy grasses can be unsightly so it'd be best to leave areas like these near fence lines or somewhere out of sight.

If possible, converting portions of your lawn to gardens planted with native plants is the ideal option. Fill it with native flowers and bunch grasses. A more extreme option is converting your lawn to a bee lawn, which is composed of short-statured grass and wildflowers than can tolerate foot traffic. Always avoid using herbicides and pesticides when possible.

## Plant a Log

A dead tree stump while small in size can be host to an entire ecosystem. The side of the log that is against the ground provides a moist environment for insect like spiders and beetles. Underneath the bark will be teeming with ants and others small insects. Wood boring beetles will burrow into dead wood creating channels perfect for nesting pollinators or overwintering.

“Planting” a log is as simple as it sounds, take a stump or large branch and lie it on the ground. Then mound a few inches of soil around the bottom of the branch or stump. Hardwoods are ideal but any tree species will do. To enhance the habitat surround the log with sticks and rocks. If the log is free from insect burrows, drilling small holes can create artificial nesting areas for pollinators.



## Create a Brush Pile

Another option is to simply pile a bunch of sticks together. The brush pile creates excellent habit for insects of all types. It can also serve as hiding spots for small mammals like chipmunks piles are a favorite of some song birds.

A brush pile can go anywhere but an ideal spot for most people is somewhere out of the way. Largest sticks and branches should be on the bottom to help keep the pile sturdy. Piles should be anywhere from 2ft to 8ft tall and 3ft to 10ft wide. The pile will settle over time, so feel free to keep adding new material.