

Montana  Pollinator
Education Project

Sweat Bee



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**solitary, social, eusocial
& communal nesters**

Background:
Black-eyed Susan blossoms
Photo courtesy of @Shehit, Shutterstock

Sweat Bees - Numerous Species

Genus: Multiple genera Family: Halictidae

Metallic with pale hairs which may form stripes,
color variety common

3-15 mm long

Multiple species in North America

Sweat bees get their name from the fact that they are attracted to sweat and will lick you to get the salt in your sweat! The salt may be important for nutrients needed for reproduction.

The halictids are a very large group of bees, often with metallic coloring; several species make up this large group. Because of the large variety of bees in this group there is also quite a variance in size, shape, and coloring. Some of the species like *Halictus* are dark with light colored bands, and the females have faded metallic green shades. The females of this species have hairs on the hind legs which catch and carry pollen.

Most of the bees in the Halictidae family will visit a number of flowers for nectar and pollen, they are quite small but are often the most abundant bee in the landscape. Some *Halictus* species pollinate crops like watermelon, stone fruits (those with a large seed), alfalfa, and sunflower varieties.

Most of the species nest in the ground. The *Halictus* prefer sandy soils and they line their brood cells with a waxy material. This wax is secreted from an organ on the abdomen tip called the Dufour's gland. The *Lasioglossum* species will also build their nests in the ground and also secrete a waxy substance for the brood cells. Unlike the *Halictus*, the secretion from

the *Lasioglossum* is also used to line the burrow and entrance. This particular waxy substance is difficult to detach. A single egg is laid on top of a pollen ball in each cell, which will provide food for the larvae. The adult provides enough food in each cell for the larvae until it emerges. Sweat bees like to nest in undisturbed areas. They are a prized pollinator for wildflowers as well.

