

Bees Eat from Our Lawn

In early spring, three dandelion plants blossomed in the lawn in front of our house. I like the bright yellow blossoms, but I know they are thought of as weeds, and they spread rapidly. I got the knife I use to cut roots of weeds beneath the soil's surface.

When I got back to the dandelions, two honeybees gathered nectar from the yellow blossoms to feed themselves and their fellow bees. I wasn't willing to interrupt the bee's work and cut off their immediate food supply. I thought daffodils might be the only other flowers braving still-cold weather.

I took the knife back to its shelf. The bees went on happily with their work.

Warmer weather came to central Oregon, and other plants blossomed.

When bees had plenty of flowers to choose from, I pulled dandelions and other non-lawn plants from my lawn. Seeds kept sprouting and I didn't have as green and weed-free a lawn as many do, largely because I didn't cut the first flowers before they produced seed.

Rules of my neighborhood require a lawn and flower beds. For flowers, I plant native plants that take little water and maintenance but that bloom in gay profusion at different times through the summer. I replace more and more grass with native plants. To my eye, this xeriscaping is more attractive than the monoculture of a green lawn.

Bees, other pollinators, and birds also find a variety of plants native to this area more attractive than a green lawn, where there is little of interest or sustenance for creatures of the wild world. Conversion of my flower beds and lawn to native plants is a gradual process, as I find time, energy, and means.

As I expand my flower beds into my lawn, there are no complaints from the community around me. That might mean awareness that we need to approach our habitat with consideration for the entire community of life increases and keeps pace with my changes in landscaping. Or, lack of complaints could mean no one pays attention to what I'm doing. I keep doing what I'm doing.

When I'm ready to completely eliminate green grass in favor of local, flowering plants, neighborhood rules may have

changed. My changes in landscaping might help raise awareness and evolve rules toward more environmental balance.

My back yard is wild, backed up against a small wild area, and already attractive to wildlife. I plant more native, blossoming, seed-bearing plants and eliminate plants that aren't native to the area. I supplement the natural provender that grows wild with seeds I put on the ground in an area I've cleared for that purpose. Quail, doves, several types of sparrows, Oregon juncos, slate grey juncos, Steller's jays, other birds, and two squirrels eat in my back yard. They twist and turn in all directions as they eat, to watch for predators. I cut cover available for predators, most notably feral cats, short.

In winter, I wade out through every new snow, clear the feed ground of snow, and scatter feed there for birds and other animals. They express their gratitude for my efforts by making themselves available in all their beauty and activity for me to watch.

I sit at my desk and look over my computer monitor as I write. I watch plants through all seasons, as they happily grow toward the sky, seed the next generation, and start all over again in this process of living. I watch brown butterflies, black butterflies and small white butterflies feed from plant to plant. A hummingbird flies rapidly to feed on nectar from different plants and flies away before I can decide if I know what species it is. Damselflies and dragonflies of different sizes and colors feed from and rest on plants. Quail run out of the native weeds up the hill and feed on the seed I've scattered above the rock wall I built four years ago. Life beyond my ability to see or count inhabits and enriches the soil.

Two mornings ago, a beautiful grey, russet, white and brown, yellow-eyed coyote crossed the feed ground, stopped and looked at me through my window, then trotted away on her morning rounds. I stopped writing for a long moment and thought silent gratitude for her and for all the life that shares my yard.

Then, as I continued to watch my back yard, I began to write an essay about life, about building my yard to feed life.