

Bees Benefit From Sunflower Pollen, Says New Study

It's about time the bees get some good news! A new study finds that sunflower pollen can lower the rates of certain infections in two different kinds of bees, the bumblebee and the European honeybee. The pollen lowered the rates of *Crithidia bombi* (a particular pathogen) infection in bumble bees (*Bombus impatiens*) and also reduced another pathogen, *Nosema ceranae*, of the European honey bee (*Apis mellifera*). Bumblebees who consumed sunflower pollen also produced more eggs, larvae, and had a higher probability of pupating. Rebecca Irwin is a professor of applied ecology at NC State and one of the senior co-authors of the study.

We've tried other monofloral pollens, or pollens coming from one flower, but we seem to have hit the jackpot with sunflower pollen...None of the others we've studied have had this consistent positive effect on bumble bee health."

Bad News for Bees

The bee crisis has been in headlines more than ever lately. Neonicotinoids, a class of pesticides acknowledged as particularly toxic to bees, damage bee's immune systems, promote disorientation, disrupt gut microbes, and shorten their life cycles. Recent studies have also found that the problem may be more serious than previously thought. Bees can develop a preference for pesticides. These agricultural chemicals are also impairing bees' ability to remember and learn things.

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Benefits of Sunflowers

While sunflower pollen won't be able to address the harm bees suffer from pesticides, the flower can still provide protection from certain infection.

Sunflower seeds have a plethora of nutrients, especially vitamin E. That might hold the key to sunflower's ability to help the bees fight off disease. Vitamin E is a great source of antioxidants, has anti-inflammatory properties, contains zinc for the immune system, and have even been shown to fight infections in human infants. A vitamin E deficiency can lead to neurological issues like balance problems and lack of coordination. These neurological problems also sound like things bees experience when they're repeatedly exposed to sunflower seeds. Could vitamin E, through sunflower seeds, do even more for the bees?

As They Go, So Do We

Bees are crucial to our food supply. Thirty-five percent of the world's crops depend on pollinators like bees. The bees needed for that are disappearing at a rapid rate. A survey of beekeepers found that 33 percent of their bees died in 2016 and 2017. Our food system depends on them. The discovery of sunflower pollen as a potential support for bees is a step in repairing the massive damage inflicted on these insects.

Recommended: *How to Detox From Plastics and Other Endocrine Disruptors*

Sources:

- *Sunflower Pollen Has Medicinal, Protective Effects on Bees* – NC State University
- *Medicinal value of sunflower pollen against bee pathogens* – Nature.com
- *34 Amazing Benefits Of Sunflower Seeds* (Surajmukhi Ke

Beej) For Skin, Hair, And Health – Style Craze

- *Benefits of Sunflower Seeds – Nuts.com*
- *Pesticides are making bees dumber – Popular Science*