

MEET THE POLLINATORS: The Long-horned bee

By Putnam Pollinator Pathway Committee



Figure 1 Photo credit: Patrick Coin on Flickr, All creative commons

Fall blooming flowers are abuzz right up until frost. Look closely at all the activity and you will likely see mostly honey bees. In late summer and as far into fall as they can, workers labor every warm daylight hour to collect enough nectar to maintain the colony through winter. If you look closely and diligently, though, you may also see one of our cute late season natives, a long-horned bee.

LONG-HORNED BEES are in the same family (*Apidae*) as honeybees, bumble bees, carpenter bees, and others. Though there are more than 426 bees native to New York State, many of them are done foraging by the end of October. The long-horned bee, along with some of the other bees of *Apidae*, happens to like some of our later garden blooms.

Long-horned bees are of the tribe *Eucerini* and have unusually long antennae – hence the name *long-horned*. They are medium-sized bees with hairy heads, bodies and back legs. Many have yellow faces with green or blue-gray eyes. But it's the long antennae that make these fuzzy little insects look quite cute.

Two major genera in the tribe are *Eucera* and *Melissodes*. In the first genera are squash bees (*Peponapis* and *Xenoglossa* spp.), specialists in the cucurbit family, and *Svastra* sunflower bees, especially important to commercial sunflower growers. Squash bees are busy summer bees, often active very early in the day in the flowers of squash and melons.

But the ones in the *Melissodes* genera are generalists, which means they visit many different flowers as they forage. These bees are important pollinators of both garden flowers and native wildflowers. Look for them on your sunflowers, coneflowers, bee balm, zinnias, rudbeckia, goldenrod, dahlias, strawflowers, cosmos, chamomile, thistles, ironweed and purple asters, maybe even a few others.

