



# All for the love of bees

An Auckland-based charity is creating a buzz around bees and food.

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**PHOTOS** FOR THE LOVE OF BEES

**FROM TOP** Hands-on learning is a given during the Earthworkers courses; For the Love of Bees is part of a network of community-supported urban farms in Auckland.

**OPPOSITE** Community gardeners harvest veges from the urban farm.



**F**or the Love of Bees had creative beginnings eight years ago. The not-for-profit started as an art project by Sarah Smuts-Kennedy centred around bee welfare, with sculptures made out of pesticide-free, pollinator-friendly flowers.

These large sculptural flower projects were planted around Auckland's CBD, and educational workshops were also held. Arlette Barraclough, from For the Love of Bees, says as these activations were happening around the flower sculptures, the focus shifted towards pesticides being one of the central reasons that bees needed saving.

"If we want to advocate for our bees and have a world that's safe for bees, then we need to fix the way that we grow food. So growing food was kind of a natural evolution for us."

The group established an urban farm on Symonds Street in 2018, which has evolved into their core work. For the Love of Bees have transformed the site (owned by the City Rail Link) from a carpark into regenerative farmland that provides food and a green space in the city.

Arlette says at first they just grew "fast" crops, like lettuce greens. "Things have developed over the past few years; we're now at the point where we have between 30 and 40 family-sized veggie boxes that go out to customers every single week.

"Of course, we're still growing flowers. We grow flowers and vegetables next to each other as we want our pollinators to be happy. There's an intrinsic relationship between bees and food – three-quarters of the crops that humans depend on for food are pollinated in part by bees."

For the Love of Bees is part of a network of community garden projects around the city, specifically five other urban farms.

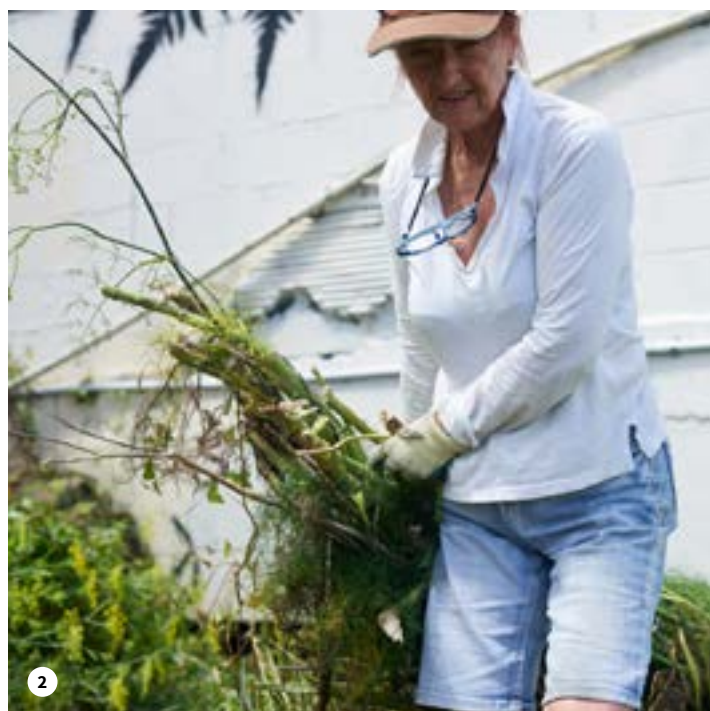
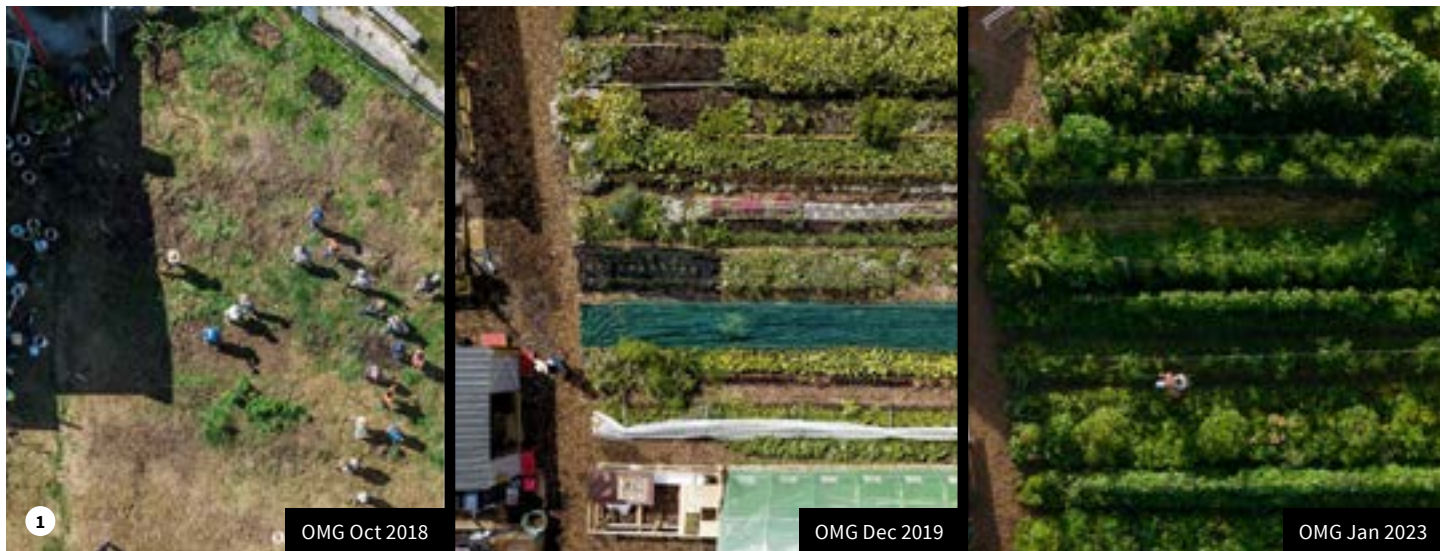
"I call them 'community connected farms' because that encapsulates urban farms and community gardens. There are lots of different types of community gardens in Auckland, but we're really a part of a community of people doing similar projects. Ours is a little bit more focused on pollinator welfare and bees and biodiversity loss, and we're excited about how to grow food in a way that mitigates climate change and biodiversity loss."

For the Love of Bees has also been running courses, called Earthworkers: Regenerative Agriculture 101. These intensive courses are held in Auckland and other centres around Aotearoa, and Arlette says there's a desire to continue those. So far they have had more than 150 people go through the course for all sorts of reasons. Attendees receive follow-up mentoring and attendees stay connected afterwards, sharing tips.

"Some have market gardens; there are others who are leaders within their church group and want to start a garden, or people who work in advocacy, or the healthcare space. People who are involved in healthcare, whether it's physical health or mental health, are aware that gardening has massive therapeutic benefits."

Looking ahead, Arlette says it's a difficult time for not-for-profits across the board.

"For people who are operating in the climate action space, there's been a real lack of funding, so our number one goal is to survive. We want to continue with our urban farm and intensifying how productive it can be. Every single year we say, there's no way we're going to get more vegetables out of this land next year, and then we surpass ourselves. And we want to continue our learning network with the other urban farms around Auckland, because it's a really wonderful process of upskilling together."



**1.** The transition of the site over the years shows how For the Love of Bees has changed an empty lot into a thriving urban farm. **2.** Community support is essential to keep the urban farm running. **3.** Happy pollinators leads to happy crops, so flowers and veges are grown together. **4.** Earthworkers courses are biology-first, with healthy soil central to growing success.

## Meet the locals

It's perhaps a little known fact there are 28 native bee species in New Zealand. These bees (mainly from three genera – *Leioproctus*, *Lasioglossum* and *Hylaeus*) don't have hives or produce honey; instead, they live in nests in the ground and are quite solitary. They're non-aggressive and rarely sting. Arlette says many people mistake them for wasps because they're so tiny.



“Most people are primarily aware of honey bees and bumble bees. We see them all the time and they look like how we imagine a bee should look, whereas New Zealand native bees are a lot smaller, and more complicated to spot. They're not bright yellow, they're tiny and black.”

She points out we have this connection between bees and hives in our heads. “We don't have lots of narratives and children's books about New Zealand native bees. It's a bee that looks different to what we've been taught by European storytelling and common knowledge.”

Our native bees are under threat, and yet they're essential for biodiversity in Aotearoa. “They're so important for pollinating our native plant species and also lots of introduced crops,” says Arlette.

“Generally, what is damaging to our native bees is the same thing for honey bees, bumble bees and all the other pollinators, and that's pesticides and intensive agriculture.”

She says there is also a level of competition between native and introduced species of bees for the pollination of some plant species. New Zealand native bees have adapted to some introduced species but not all of them, whereas honey bees are pretty adaptable.


Planting more native trees and plants benefits the native bees, but they also need diversity as well. “Bees are just like people – they don't want to eat exactly the same thing all the time.”



Find out more about native bees and the work of For the Love of Bees at [fortheloveofbees.co.nz](http://fortheloveofbees.co.nz)



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