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InsectID | virescent green metallic bee



Above: It's easy to identify virescent green metallic bees—and easy to see how they got their name. The green segments of their bodies sparkle on sunny days.

The virescent green metallic bee—you may not have known the name, but very likely you've encountered these medium-size bees flitting around the flowers in your garden, gathering nectar and pollen. They are easy to spot, with metallic coloring that sparkles in the sunshine.

They're about three-eighths of an inch in length. The male has a shiny green head and thorax (the section between the head and abdomen) and a striped black and yellow abdomen. The female's head, thorax and abdomen are all metallic green in some species; in others her abdomen is striped black and white.

Virescent green metallic bees build their nests in the ground. If you're lucky enough to spot one flying home, watch it as it disappears, head first, into a tiny circular hole at the soil surface. It's here where they bring protein-rich pollen sacs to leave as food for their larvae.

These bees are taxonomically classified in the family Halictidae and genus *Agapostemon*. Like other members of the Halictidae, they're also called solitary bees or sweat bees. The latter name comes from the fact that, given the opportunity, they will drink our sweat for its salts. Unlike butterflies and moths, which have a long tube-like projection called a proboscis, bees possess a true tongue. The bee tongue is very specialized for gathering nectar, their energy drink.

If you find a virescent landing upon you, don't panic; that would only agitate it. These bees can sting, but their sting is quite mild compared to other insects' stings. They do not leave their stinger behind; it's not barbed like a honeybee's. Stay calm and the bee will most likely leave after a short while.

The virescent green metallic bee's geographical range is quite large, covering most of the United States and into southern Canada. They're very commonly seen throughout the late



Above: Pollen sticks to a bee's rear legs as she moves across a flower.

spring and summer and are extremely involved in the pollination process for many of the flowers that they visit. They land on a flower and rub their hind legs across the stamens so pollen grains attach to hairs on their legs. At the next flower they visit, some of these pollen grains shake loose as they move their legs, thus assuring pollination.

I don't see virescent green metallic bees as preferring one plant to another. They act more as a generalist feeder, visiting a variety of flowers. In our garden, I've seen them visiting pink Persian cornflower (*Centaurea dealbata* 'Rosea'), hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*), coneflowers (*Echinacea* spp.), tickseeds (*Coreopsis* spp.), blanket-flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*) and cosmos, among others. 🐝

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