

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Bee Babies: How Bees Reproduce

Bees are remarkable insects with unique ways of reproducing and raising their young. The process begins with the queen bee, the only female in a colony that can lay eggs. Queen bees are responsible for keeping the hive full of new bees.

When a queen is ready to mate, she leaves the hive and flies to a special spot called a "drone congregation area." Male bees, called drones, gather in this area, hoping to mate with the queen. The queen can mate with multiple drones during this time, and she stores their sperm in her body. This stored sperm is enough for the queen to lay eggs throughout her entire life, which can last up to five years!

After mating, the queen returns to the hive to lay eggs. She can lay up to 2,000 eggs a day during her busiest time. The type of egg she lays depends on the needs of the hive. Fertilized eggs become female worker bees or new queens, while unfertilized eggs develop into male drones. These eggs are laid in small wax cells, which worker bees prepare ahead of time.

Bee eggs hatch in about three days, and tiny larvae emerge. The worker bees feed the larvae a special substance called royal jelly for the first few days. After that, most larvae are fed a mixture of honey and pollen. Larvae destined to become queens are fed only royal jelly for their entire development.

After about six days, the larvae spin cocoons and enter the pupal stage, where they grow into adult bees. The entire process from egg to adult bee takes about three weeks. Once they emerge, worker bees immediately start helping in the hive by cleaning, building, or gathering food. Drones, however, leave the hive to try and mate with queens from other colonies.

Bees do not care for their young in the same way mammals do. Instead, the hive works together to ensure the larvae have everything they need to grow. This teamwork helps the colony thrive and continue its important work in nature.