

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## The Life Cycle of Bumblebees

Bumblebees have a fascinating way of reproducing and caring for their colony. Their life cycle begins with a single queen and ends with a thriving colony full of worker bees, drones, and future queens.

In early spring, after hibernating through the winter, a queen bumblebee wakes up and begins searching for a nesting site. Once she finds a suitable spot, such as an abandoned rodent burrow or a

clump of grass, she lays her first eggs. The queen uses stored sperm from her mating in the previous summer to fertilize these eggs.

The eggs hatch in about 4 to 5 days, turning into tiny larvae. The queen feeds these larvae with nectar and pollen until they grow large enough to spin cocoons. Inside the cocoons, the larvae transform into adult bees, a process that takes about two weeks. These first bees are female workers who will take over many of the queen's duties, such as collecting food and caring for new larvae.

As summer progresses, the queen lays more eggs. Some of these eggs develop into male bumblebees, called drones, while others become new queens. Drones leave the nest to find queens from other colonies. When a drone finds a queen, they mate. After mating, the drones' role is complete, and they do not return to their original colony.

The new queens that emerge in late summer will leave the nest to prepare for the next cycle. They find a safe place to hibernate over the winter, carrying the sperm they will use to start their own colonies the following spring.

Bumblebees do not care for their young in the same way mammals do. However, the queen and worker bees work together to provide food and protect the larvae. The colony itself is like one big family, ensuring the next generation survives and thrives.

Bumblebees' reproductive behaviors show the incredible teamwork and cycles of nature that help keep ecosystems healthy and balanced.