

It was only a few years ago that our flower gardens were abuzz with the activities of honeybees collecting nectar. Yet, this spring only a few have made their way back. I've been guilty of taking these small creatures for granted and am somewhat ashamed of my former ignorance concerning their vital role outside of my garden. Of course, I've read and heard about problems that beekeepers have been having but haven't thought about the world impact if honeybees were to disappear.

Do you know that a sterile female worker honeybee can fly ten to fifteen miles per hour and will visit 50-100 flowers during each trip or that it will take 2 million flower visits and 55,000 miles to produce one pound of honey? A truly amazing creature, a worker bee will return to its hive with samples of flower nectar and perform an elaborate dance to relay the details of direction, distance, quality and quantity of the nectar supply to other bees. It is intent on maintaining the food supply of the hive.

Do you know that the flight of the honeybee results in the fertilization of 80% of all the foods we eat or one out of every third bite of food in the average American diet? The honeybee pollinates 100 U.S. crops including fruits, nuts, vegetables and seeds and is essential to the \$15 billion dollar agricultural crop industry. Every year, hives are moved across the U.S. from California to North Dakota to Florida and other states to pollinate fields of almonds, clover and alfalfa, as well as orange groves and apple orchards, on a seasonal rotation. Two hives per acre are needed to fertilize the almond crop in CA (2/3 of all commercially available hives) which provides 80% of the world's demand for almonds and 99% of the U.S. demand. The

THE BUZZ ABOUT BEES

by Anne Ditmer

importance of one small insect simply staggers the mind.

Every since man began raising bees for honey 8000 years ago, the fragility of a bee's life has been known. A wild hive can contain 20,000 bees and a domestic hive up to 80,000. To lose 1000 or more bees from a hive during a summer of beekeeping is not unusual. But since 1987, much higher numbers have died. It is believed that the world bee population has dropped by 50% over the past 20 years. It started with the introduction of the Asian varroa mite, with its infestation causing the devastation of almost every feral bee colony on the North American continent. Beekeepers lost from 30% to 100% of their hives. Miticides were introduced and the mite was kept at bay but over time, it has developed resistance. In 2005 bees took another devastating hit. This time a name was given to the new problem, Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Over 23% of U. S. beekeepers have been affected in 24 states. Worker bees are leaving the hives and not returning, leading to the death of the queen, drones and bee larvae. Although there is yet to be one specific cause, the list includes:



- Israeli Acute Paralysis Virus (IAPV) documented in 65% of the affected hives, thought to be the top suspect
- poor nutrition from extreme droughts which limit flower nectar production
- use of chemical sprays particularly those containing imidaclopid, a

synthetic derivative of nicotine that impairs the nervous systems of insects resulting in paralysis and death. Over 5 billion pounds of this insecticide formulation is used on trees, lawns, golf courses, and food crops under the trade names of Advantage, Premise, Merit, Provado, Admire, Gaucho, and Safari, to name a few.

- stress from having the domestic hives moved across the U.S. from CA to FL to pollinate fields of almonds, clover, alfalfa, orange groves, apple orchards, etc on a seasonal rotation.

Scientist, geneticists and entomologists are working together to determine all the factors (infectious, genetic and environmental) involved so that we humans can save the honeybee. What can you as a gardener do? Raise a bee-friendly garden! Be sure to have lots of diversity in flowering plants throughout the year to supply the nectar needed for a thriving colony. Provide a water supply for the bees as well as predator protection such as some old hollowed out logs in which they can hide (if your landscape allows). Avoid use of chemical sprays during times of bee activity; better yet, use biological means of control or choose disease and insect resistant plants. Most of all, "bee-aware" of the importance of this small creature that not only provides for the seed production of your garden plants (ensuring future generations of flowers) but for the majority of the foods you consume! **[E]**



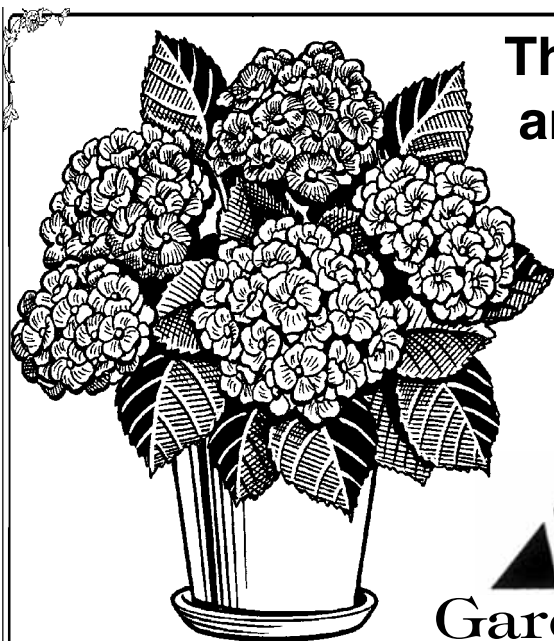
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