

The Importance of Bees and How to Help Them



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The success of the agriculture industry depends on pollinators, such as native bees and honeybees. The annual contribution of honeybees in the United States is around \$15 billion, and roughly 80 percent of all crop pollination is dependent on honeybees. Without honeybees, farmers and consumers would suffer immensely. Whether it's purchasing local honey or starting your own garden, there are ways you can do your part to help save the bees.

The Disappearance of Honeybees

In the 1970s, the number of honeybee colonies was more than 4 million, but today, that number has dropped to 2.5 million. Several factors are believed to be at play, including the loss of habitat, pesticide use, fungal diseases, and mite infestations. However, scientists aren't entirely sure of the cause and have labeled the epidemic as Collapse Disorder, or CCD, which refers to the unexplained disappearance and death of honeybee colonies.

Unfortunately, little is known about CCD. Although losses are not uncommon, the current losses are different from ones in the past. Typically, even if they leave, adult bees return to the hive;

not doing so is uncharacteristic of bee behavior. Also, losses are occurring more rapidly and in larger numbers.

The Role of Bees in Food Production

The [Nature Conservancy](#) states that the honeybee is “the greatest pollinating machine when it comes to agriculture.” While the wind can aid in pollination, most plants – including almonds, soybeans, watermelon, avocados, squash, cotton, peaches, and more – require insects to do the job. Without pollination, plants would not be able to reproduce, and crop yields would drastically decrease.

The efficiency of honeybees in regards to pollination is due in part to their great numbers, which is why their dwindling numbers is of great concern. It’s not just the crops that rely on bees. An estimated 80 percent of *all* flowering plants and trees rely on bees. Undoubtedly, bees play a crucial role in the balance of a healthy ecosystem.

How to Protect Bees

Big agriculture companies can [help](#) by partaking in ecological farming, which avoids large monocrops, uses natural composting systems, and avoids pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

You can help bees thrive too. For starters, you can also help by purchasing local honey. If you want to do more, grow a garden that consists of native plants to help increase bee populations. When caring for your garden, reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides.

To make the garden more enticing, [provide](#) homes for native bees. For example, mason, leaf-cutter, and other wood-cavity nesting solitary bees like bee blocks. Mining, sweat, and other ground-dwelling solitary bees prefer bare, sunny soil. Shelter can be provided with bits of wood in a pile. Bees need water too, so put out a shallow dish of water and add some pebbles to prevent drowning.

How to Start a Garden

When you’re ready to [start](#) a garden, the first step is to choose a location that has the proper amount of sun exposure and easy access to water. You’ll also need to assess what type of soil you have and whether it needs supplementing. Selecting the right type of plants is also vital. You’ll need to consider your hardiness zone, how much space you have, the soil type, and how much time you are willing to devote to their care.

Design your garden by choosing a mix of plants, including annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. For example, if you choose to grow an [edible garden](#), choose shrubs like blueberries, green leafy vegetables like lettuce, and colorful fruits and vegetables like strawberries and squash. “Choosing some type of theme, whether it’s a color scheme, a style, or a group of

plants, will not only help give your garden a sense of cohesion, it will help make your design choices easier,” suggests The Spruce.

Considering that every three bites of food you consume is thanks to bees, protecting them is a no-brainer. While starting a garden is a great way to help the bees, you can also skip on pesticides in your yard, purchase from local farmers, and provide homes for bees in your yard. Bees play such a vital role in our food supply and in the ecosystem as a whole. By supporting their populations, you can do your part to help them thrive once again.

For more information please visit: savingourbees.org