

Bring The Buzz Back To Your Garden

Our honey bees are being attacked by the parasite “Varroa Mite”. The honey bee population, because of this endemic, is being greatly reduced in the United States, which should be of great concern to everyone.

As Gardeners, we can help to overcome this problem by planting nectar enriched plants that produce the sugar-rich liquid our honey bees need. Not only do the bees benefit from these plants but so do the hoverflies and butterflies. Hoverflies should be encouraged in the garden because they pollinate while searching for nectar, and its larvae predate aphids and other small pests.

Bees are especially attracted to blues and lilacs while hoverflies are attracted to deep yellows and oranges. Butterflies and bees like single petal flowers with large attractive centers, like the Scabiosa pink “David Wilkie” or the blue “Pincushion Flower”. These plants are examples that give a landing platform making it easy for the bee or butterfly to see and upon which to light.

Double flowers are usually sterile with no value to insects. The anthers and nectarines have been replaced by petals and so can’t be fertilized. Many pollinating insects have to ingest protein-rich pollen before they can breed and some use pollen to feed their young. They all need the calories to fly.

Plant your flowers in groups because color and scent together make it easier for the insects to find. If a plant has veined or spotted flowers, the insects pick up the markings before the actual color. So the bells of foxglove, hollyhocks, lupines, and delphiniums are nectar on a stick in your garden.

The following plants are most useful, as well as pretty, in your garden: John Coutts, Violetta (centaurea); Butterfly Bush, (buddleia); tall Verbena Rigida;

Purple Dame's Rocket (looks like phlox); Dragon Fly (aquilegia); Asters; Sunflowers; Heliotrope; Alyssum; and Catmint. Start your blooming time early in spring and on through summer ending in October. Check with your local nurseries for more information on helpful flowers in your area. Many of our roses are attractive to bees, especially single petal, fragrant ones.

Our gardens are full of roses that need our good insects. We must do what we can to welcome them into the garden. By planting these nectar-rich plants, we will bring into our gardens a world of fantasy and delight as we help to preserve our precious honey bees.

We can contribute to the health of the bee population by adhering to these suggestions when using insecticides.

1. Read labels – they may include specific restrictions that protect bees. Observe state pesticide rules.
2. Do not apply insecticides having a long residual hazard to bees during blooming periods.
3. Use insecticides that are less hazardous to bees when you can and still control the pest problem.
4. Do not spray when temperatures are going to be low after the treatment or when dew is forecast. Residues usually remain toxic to bees twice as long under these conditions.
5. Bees are most active during 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. late evening applications are less hazardous to bees.

Signs and symptoms of bee poisoning are:

1. Aggressiveness
2. Lack of foraging bees on a blooming garden
3. Stupefaction, paralysis, jerky, wobbly or rapid movements; spinning on their back.
4. The appearance of bees unable to fly.
5. Notice of dead bees on flowers or in the garden.

One bee returning to the hive with a load of contaminated pollen or nectar can cause a number of bees to become agitated and die. This action can disrupt and damage the colony.

Fungicides and herbicides usually are not a cause of concern for honey bee poisoning.

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