

## The Bees Feed Us!

Honeybees (originally from Europe) pollinate 1/3 of our food crops, such as almonds and oranges. Our native Bumblebees also pollinate food crops, such as tomatoes and watermelons. Other native bees work alongside them. For example, the Blue Orchard Bee is the most efficient pollinator of apples and cherries. The Alkali Bee is essential for pollinating alfalfa, which is fed to cattle. Without bees, our food supply would be severely impoverished. You can help all the bees by choosing organic, naturally raised, or locally grown food from farms that do not use systemic, persistent insecticides.



## What is happening to the Bees?

### The Issue:

In 2004, U.S. beekeepers working in commercial and amateur honeybee operations began noticing massive losses of bees – from 30 to 100% in the worst cases. Turns out, France had first noted these losses in the mid-1990s and had already been attempting to find the cause. Despite efforts to date, beekeepers continue to lose, on average, between 29-36% of their hives each year. In 2006, it was named “Colony Collapse Disorder” or CCD. But giving it a name doesn’t fix the problem, and it doesn’t determine the cause – it’s only a name for the symptom, which is – the missing bees.

Mounting evidence suggests that the key to CCD is a relatively new player added to things bees have always been subjected to. The usual suspects are mites, fungus, other bee pathogens, the stress of being trucked around the country all year to pollinate crops, multiple pesticide loadings and the substitution of high fructose corn syrup instead of honey to feed the bees in winter. The new player appears to be a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids, or neonics for short.

Neonics are systemic pesticides that get into every part of the plant, including nectar and pollen, even if they only have been used to treat the seeds. Low doses may not kill the bees, but research is showing that they build up over time, creating chronic long-term effects including weakened immunity, inability for the bees to smell sweetness, and confusion when they try to find their way home. As beekeepers will tell you, the bees aren’t dead in the hive. They are just gone.

### What You Can Do Locally:

There are many little things you can do. Don’t use pesticides or buy plants that have been pre-treated with pesticides. Plant a variety of flowers for blooms from spring to fall. Let the wild things bloom around the edges. Encourage clover to grow in your lawn; bees love clover. Consider planting with native species of wildflowers, locally sourced. Since 70% of native bees nest in the ground, avoid disturbing the soil. Provide a dish of water with some pebbles in it for bees to drink. Here’s a bonus: By protecting honeybees and native bees, you also will encourage other beneficial insects that prey on pests.