

What home gardeners can do about the bee-population decline

By LADD SMITH

A topic of real concern to gardeners across the country is the recent major decline in the honeybee population. Referred to as “colony collapse disorder (CCD),” it was first reported in the U.S. in October 2006 and spread rapidly, with beekeepers reporting losses of between 50 percent to 90 percent of bees. While the exact causes are not known, there are a va-

riety of theories, including pesticide use, migratory stress and the bees’ immune system failure.

According to a National Geographic news article published in spring of this year, CCD



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has spread throughout 24 states and ruined hundreds of thousands of bee colonies, which will likely have a huge impact for fruit growers as well as home gardeners who rely on the bees’ pollination.

The beekeeping industry has been quick to respond to the crisis. The national Honey Board has pledged \$13,000 of emergency funding to the CCD Working Group. Other organizations, such as the Florida

State Beekeepers Association, are working with their membership to commit additional funds. Below are some things home gardeners can do to help:

- Plant a bee garden — To help existing populations thrive, abundant food sources are necessary, as well as shelter. A good diversity of plants is recommended, with varying heights and species. Plantings should be within 200 yards of the plants needing pollination. The Washington Native Plant Society has lists of plants that do well in each county: www.wnps.org/plant_lists/exploring_native_plants.html.

- Create an insectary — These garden spaces are planted with varieties that attract beneficial insects for the garden as well as assist the bee populations by providing pollen.

- Say no to pesticides — Refrain from using pesticides, especially broad spectrum insecticides that kill a wide variety of insects. Carbaryl insecticides are especially toxic to bees. Bees will pick up pesticides from flowering plants and take them back to the hive. One brand of insecticide is said to have a grain that looks like a grain of pollen, which made it even more likely to be picked up by bees. In short, insecticides kill insects; bees are insects. If

you kill off the bees, who is going to pollinate your flowers, vegetables and fruit trees?

- Add Orchard Mason bees to your garden — The Orchard Mason bee is non-aggressive and will sting only if handled roughly or if it gets trapped under clothing, which makes them particularly desirable in more urban areas. This bee does not live in a nest like other bees; it lives in holes that are already available. It’s easy and fun to make a bee house to provide cover and places to raise their young. How to build a bee house, from the National Wildlife Federation: www.nwf.org/backyard/beehouse.cfm.

Our gardens are more than just outside decoration for our homes, they are natural spaces that we share with birds, bees and other wildlife. Creating garden spaces that help our friends in the natural world thrive, especially when we think of all they do for us, is a very satisfying thing indeed.

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