

The Buzz about Bees

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“Beekeepers are very generous and Mike helped me get started with my hives; he recommended that I join MDBA.” Wolosenko explains that the group provides training and organizes meetings that supported new beekeepers. Also a horticulturist, Wolosenko enjoys observing the bees when “they do their own thing.” She thinks that the biggest problem beekeepers have is keeping other creatures from preying on the bees. “An ant attack can wipe out a whole colony in the few days,” she recalls from experience.

Something similar happened in the communal Moraga Garden Farms. Bill Durkin recounts that a hive was installed in a corner of the garden for a year and made a difference in terms of yield. “They swarmed twice,” he said, “but then one day, they disappeared.”

Bees have been under a lot of stress. According to Sparks, the country is losing 40% of its bees to diseases and Colony

Collapse Disorder (CCD). “It is a very complex issue with more than one cause,” explains Sparks, “when we saved bees from certain diseases we might have weakened the hives by keeping alive individuals that should have died. Plus certain pesticides are very detrimental to bees and when traces find their way into honeycombs it weakens the larvae.” According to Sparks, if the country continues to lose 40% of its bees every year the situation will be catastrophic for farmers. “We will have to import massive quantities of bees from all over the world, thus creating another potential problem there.” Everyone remembers the horror stories of the Africanized bees, dubbed ‘killer bees.’

Wolosenko, a landscape architect with Roxy Designs, also believes that everyone can contribute to support the local bee population. “I have designed gardens for beekeepers,” she says, “To determine if a garden is a good wildlife habitat



Roxy Wolosenko and her 13-year old daughter, Anya, check on their bees



A bee in the Shively's garden

Photos Sophie Braccini

you look at the air space above the plants and you see who is coming to visit.” She recommends planting native plants such as Coyote Brush, because they will attract native bees, and plants such as lavender and rosemary that have a long flowering season and can help support the hives during the winter.

For those seriously interested in learning about bees, the best bet is to go to the first meeting of the season organized in January by MDBA. “We meet the second Thursday of the month at Heather Farms between January and October,” explains Gentry, “interested people should come to the first meetings in January, February and March to learn the basics, then in April, they will join the group’s order for new colonies and they will be able to start their beehives.” On April 15 MDBA holds a traditional workshop at which participants can obtain all they need to become active beekeepers, including a few thousand bees to set in their boxes.

“It is a wonderful experience,” concludes Gentry, “you learn to see like a bee – to see the world through their unique perspective.”

For more information go to www.diablobees.org.