

Lamorinda

OUR HOMES

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Organize your home

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Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Bee careful



Bottlebrush attracts bumblebees.

Photo Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian

“The keeping of bees is like the direction of sunbeams.” ~ Henry David Thoreau

Barefoot and wearing our bathing suits, my daughter was teaching me Bar Method exercises out on our lawn on a beautiful summer afternoon. Partway through the practice I was stung on my foot by a honeybee dining on the clover. Clover is a wonderful addition to lawns as it adds natural nitrogen to the soil, however, when playing on the grass we must remember to be cautious as both red and white clover provide favorite nectar to our honey friends.

We all want to attract pollinators to our gardens. The more flowers you grow equals the more food for the habitat of the pollinators. Bees, butterflies, beetles, hummingbirds, bats, and birds are responsible for 35% of our food crop and 75% of the world's flowering plants. Every three bites of food eaten can be directly thanks to the pollination from these garden friends. By helping plants reproduce, pollinators sustain our ecosystem and produce our natural resources. Sadly, the pollinator population is in jeopardy on a global level.

In 2006, the honeybee population substantially declined in a phenomenon that became known as Colony Collapse Disorder or CCD. When the worker bees disappeared, they would leave behind a queen and a few nurse bees to care for the queen and the remaining immature bees. There were rarely dead bees around the hives. Hives cannot sustain themselves without worker bees which resulted in the loss of the colony. There were many theories advanced on why the problem arose including new diseases, parasites, mites, pesticide poisoning, habitat changes, poor nutrition, and stress. Although an actual cause has never been determined, most scientists believe that CCD is related to this combination of causes.

Honey bees reflect the health of the environment. Our agriculture depends on the pollination of honey bees. If bees continue to die, consumers can expect increased food prices and more scarcity. As gardeners, we can do our part to provide habitat and food for all pollinators and beneficial insects, including bees.

Here are some ways individual gardeners can make a difference while creating harmony in the landscape:

- Support the pollinator population all season by including plants that bloom spring until the beginning of winter. Bumblebees need early-season nectar and pollen while bees need late-season blooms for winter hibernation.

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