

News, trends, and fun finds

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The Birds *and the* Bees

**HOW A
GARDENING
CRUSADE COULD
HELP OUR CROPS
REPRODUCE**

BY MICHAEL A. MILLER

If you've ever enjoyed a fresh avocado salad, sent your love a bouquet of roses, or soothed your throat with a honey lozenge, you're officially indebted to the bees. Yet, we are repaying their gifts to agriculture and medicine with death and destruction instead of flowery feasts to gorge on.

Pollinators such as butterflies, bats, bugs, birds, and bees—especially honey bees—are instrumental in putting many beloved fruits and vegetables on our plates. Honey bees land on flowering plants to harvest nectar, often puncturing pollen sacs with their feet and spreading that pollen to subsequent plants they visit. This is a major way many fruit, vegetable, and nut crops reproduce. “Seventy-five percent of all flowering plants need help from bee pollinators to survive,” said Patricia Bragg, PhD, of Bragg Live Foods. “And [these plants] are not surviving.”

Neither are the bees. Honey bees are dropping dead or disappearing due to aggressive farming methods like using pesticides or GM crops. The most common insecticides in the world, neonicotinoids, are used to treat seeds before they’re planted. The water-soluble chemicals get drawn up through the tissues of the growing plant, including the pollen and nectar, where they are ingested by hungry bees. Studies show that even sub-lethal amounts of neonicotinoids impair honey bees’ ability to forage, navigate, and reproduce. A study published in *Journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* showed that neonicotinoid pesticides also damage honey bees’ immune systems, making them vulnerable to disease and bacteria.

Last year, the honey bee population dropped 44 percent, according to the USDA, and the implications of neonicotinoids don’t end there. “We are not only killing bees, but we are killing ourselves with pesticides, chemical fertilizers, Roundup; it’s so dangerous,” said Dr. Bragg. Neonicotinoids don’t wash off during rainstorms or in the kitchen, so taking a bite of most non-organic produce means you’re likely eating these chemicals.

Bees are not foreigners to displacement either. One of the top reasons for their demise is human invasion, including urbanization, pollution, and resource extraction. Opposing chemical-laden farming techniques will be healthy for ourselves



Setting the Table

Not just any plant will do. Bees need a varied and nutritious diet just like humans, and indulge in unique floral cuisine by the season.

This fall, treat your buzzing friends with:

- zinnia
- sedum
- aster
- winter bloom
- goldenrod

In the spring, bees like:

- wild lilac
- hyacinth
- crocus
- calendula
- salvia

For summer grazing, have:

- bottlebrush
- Echinacea
- snapdragon
- rose
- foxglove
- honeysuckle
- bee balm
- perennial oregano



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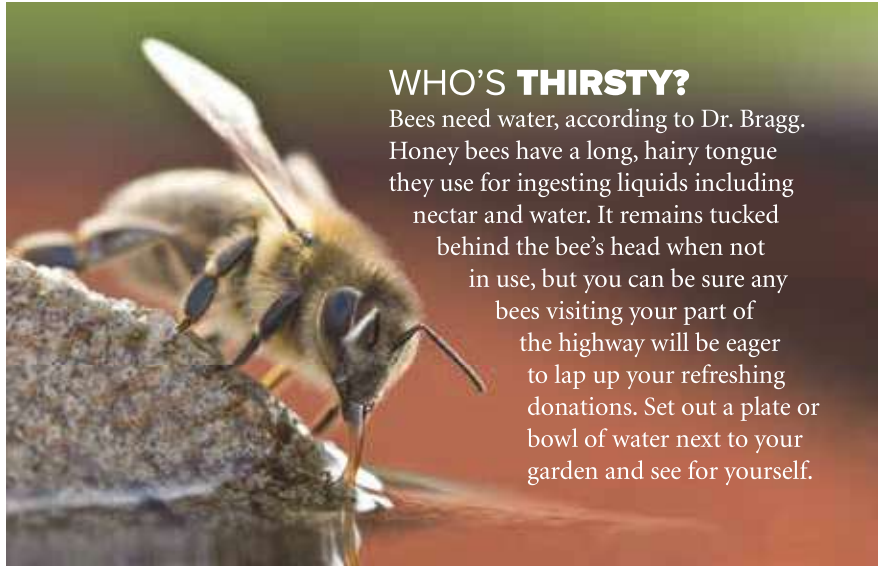
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and the bees in the long run, but the more immediate solution to saving their species (and our diets) exists in beautifying our backyards and balconies. We have the power to give back much of the habitable land they need for survival—by growing highways of pollen and petals.

“We want America to create safe bee highways,” said Dr. Bragg. She urges Americans to fortify the bee population by planting pollinator-friendly plants in yards, on porches, in community gardens, and along roadways. Creating a web of pesticide-free plants for bees to top up on nectar could be our best bet to encourage the survival of this tireless workforce. So think twice about pulling the trigger of that pesticide spray bottle, since “weeds” can be the only source of succulence for a bee in an expansive swath of manicured lawns, and adorn your patio with a rainbow of flowers for the enduring insects who put food on your table.



WHO'S THIRSTY?

Bees need water, according to Dr. Bragg. Honey bees have a long, hairy tongue they use for ingesting liquids including nectar and water. It remains tucked behind the bee's head when not in use, but you can be sure any bees visiting your part of the highway will be eager to lap up your refreshing donations. Set out a plate or bowl of water next to your garden and see for yourself.

Buzzing about Norway Construction of the first bee highway is already underway in Oslo. The sustainable bee transport environment involves feeding stations brimming with flowering plants that bees can't resist. Using both public and private resources, an environmental group called ByBi is helping facilitate these pollinator pit stops. They even set up an online map for participants to see where more plants are needed.

IN SEASON: *Kohlrabi*

This vegetable isn't as strange as it looks. It's not alien in nature, in fact, kohlrabi's closest relatives are some of the most common veggies of all—cabbage, cauliflower, and broccoli. This family resemblance means it grows above ground and contains the same cancer-fighting chemicals that its popular cousins do. This crunchy stalk comes in green or purple varieties and delivers much needed potassium, vitamin C, and fiber to those brave enough to cut through its tough exterior skin. Kohlrabi also has a high water content, which gives the bulb a slightly sweet, cucumber-like texture. Don't let its expansive leaves go to waste either! Treat them like kale or spinach by sautéing them for your morning omelet.

Spicy Kohlrabi Fries are a great snack for after school or work. Peel 1 sweet potato and 2 kohlrabi bulbs, then slice into fries. Coat fries in 1 tablespoon coconut oil and season with salt and pepper, to taste. Place fries on a cookie sheet and bake at 425 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes, turning once. Meanwhile, blend 1 cup mayo, 1 roasted red pepper (skin removed), and 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes. Once cooked, drizzle the fries with roasted red pepper mayo, fresh lime juice, and cilantro.

Kohlrabi Apple Slaw is a great addition to any dinner. It complements rosemary chicken or even pork tenderloin. Julienne 2 tart green apples and 2 peeled kohlrabi. Mix together and coat pieces with 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice. Add salt and pepper, to taste. In a separate bowl, whisk ¼ cup apple cider vinegar, 3 tablespoons maple syrup, 1 tablespoon olive oil, and 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard. Add vinaigrette to the slaw, mix well, and enjoy.

