

Celebrate Honeybee Awareness Day

Tom Stebbins

This Week in the Garden

Today is the second annual National Honeybee Awareness Day. Last year, the day was formally recognized with a proclamation from the Secretary of Agriculture.

National Honeybee Day has a simple concept: Bring together beekeepers, bee associations and other interested individuals to advance beekeeping. The primary goals are to educate the public, promote new beekeepers and bring awareness to honeybee issues. This year's theme, selected by vote from beekeepers across the country, is "Local Honey — Good for Bees, You and the Environment."

HONEY MONEY

Honeybees pollinate almost 100 flowering plants that produce food we eat. Among those foods are apples, asparagus, avocados, broccoli, blueberries, celery, cherries, citrus fruit, cranberries, cucumbers, soybeans, squash and strawberries. Honeybees pollinate alfalfa, which is one of the main sources of food for America's cows.

Beekeeping is now a humming \$15 billion industry nationwide, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Every February, beekeepers truck more than 1 million hives to California. These 40 billion bees pollinate the almond trees. This is a \$1 billion industry alone.

The estimated value of pollination to Tennessee crop agriculture exceeds \$130 million a year.

THE LOCAL BUZZ

The Tennessee Valley Beekeepers Association is a colony of Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia beekeepers. They want to sting you with enthusiasm for the study, science and craft of beekeeping. They are not just people who keep bees. They are part of your community, and most love nature on all levels.

Their mission statement is: "to promote the study, science and craft of beekeeping and to provide education and encouragement to all Tennessee beekeepers."

They swarm to regular meetings on the last Monday night of each month. The meetings start at 7 p.m. and are held at the J. Merle Crawley Agriculture Service Center, 6183 Adamson Circle, just off Bonny Oaks Drive.

Guest speakers include local, regional and state experts in beekeeping. Everyone is invited to attend these informative seminars.

The TVBA started a mentoring program this spring. Thirty new beekeepers keep their new hives at the Ag Center until October. Regular hands-on classes are given by seasoned bee experts. This gives the rookies confidence until they take their hives home.

BEE AWARE

In the last 50 years, the domesticated honeybee population has declined by about 50 percent. Researchers have attributed the bees' disappearance to a variety of factors. Among the greatest problems is the varroa mite. This is a bloodsucking parasite that attacks young and adult honeybees. Another major bee pest is the tracheal mite. These are so small they can clog the bees' breathing tubes. Both mites can spread diseases as well.

In late 2006, honeybees declined even more rapidly than from the above factors. This phenomenon was given the name colony collapse disorder, or CCD. Bees with CCD seemingly disappear from the affected hive.

Exact cause or causes of CCD are still unknown. It may take several years to fully explore the problem. This is a big concern for our continued food supply. We can help ourselves by helping the honeybees. There are many things we all can do.

Plant a bee-friendly garden with native and nectar producing flowers. Use more native plants that can grow without extra watering and chemicals. Long-flowering plants such as lavender will attract bees and give them lots of pollen, so they'll stick around longer.

Encourage and support local beekeepers. Backyard gardens benefit from nearby neighborhood beehives.

Honey comes in a wide range of flavors and colors. Lighter varieties are milder and are usually produced in the springtime. Later varieties are darker, have a bolder taste and are excellent for cooking.

The Chattanooga Market is a great source for local honey.

Contact Tom Stebbins at 855-6113 or tstebbins@utk.edu.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Honeybee Day: www.nhbad.com
Local honeybee information: www.tennvalleybeekeepers.org

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