



# Save Our Bees

*You've heard of 'Flight of the Bumblebee'? Meet the plight of the honeybee.*

BY LYNN COULTER

## Become a Beekeeper

If you want to keep bees, Fielder recommends starting with one to two hives. He estimates you'll invest \$600,000 to develop a \$50,000-a-year business, but you can begin hobby beekeeping for around \$500. Buy new equipment, he says, to avoid disease contamination. "A local association is a great place to learn, and most state land grant universities have info."

## How To Plant for Bees

Plant many different kinds of flowers. Bees prefer blue, purple, white and yellow blossoms. Choose plants with staggered bloom times to provide food throughout the season. Plant in a sunny spot that's protected from strong winds, and in large patches to make the flowers easier for bees to find.

These flowers and herbs attract bees:

- Sunflowers
- Blanket flowers
- Asters
- Catmint
- Marigolds
- Purple coneflowers
- Lavender
- Rosemary
- Tickseed
- Borage
- Salvias
- Zinnias

## OUR HONEYBEES ARE IN TROUBLE.

"The pest problems we have now are extraordinary," says beekeeper Keith Fielder, a County Extension Service agent in Eatonton, Ga. "When my grandfather kept bees, putting out a colony was like fishing. You cast a line to see what you caught." But you can't be laid back about bees anymore, warns Fielder, whose 50 hives produce about 85 pounds of honey a year. Successful beekeepers must closely manage and monitor their hives.

Today, honeybees are disappearing at a near-catastrophic rate. The trouble started around 2006, when beekeepers began reporting sudden colony losses of 30% to 90%. Scientists suspected the problem, Colony Collapse Disorder, was caused by a combination of factors, including parasites like Varroa mites, pesticide use, Nosema and other diseases, neonicotinoid insecticides, and even the stress of trucking hives around.

New research also points to a parasitic fly, *Apocephalus borealis*, that causes bees to become disoriented "zombies," flying around at night and eventually dying.

While studies continue, we can do some things now to help. Fielder recommends practicing integrated pest management, which involves identifying and controlling the pests.

"Manage your colonies and observe for infestation or disease," he says. "Bees are being bred for more tolerance to mites, and research is being done on a natural hops compound that could control mites. None of these are cures, but we can do a little with each."

We can also plant to provide good pollen and nectar sources for bees. Native plants are best. The USDA recommends red clover, foxgloves, bee balm and joe-pye weed. Consider adding some of the other plants in our list at left. You'll be doing honeybees a favor that they'll return, in richer harvests. **FL**

■ For an extensive list of resources, information on what's affecting bee populations in such large numbers, and what you can do to help, see [go.myFarmLife.com/saveourbees](http://go.myFarmLife.com/saveourbees).