

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*



STEPHEN & KRISTIN PATEGAS

Our Bee Healthy Garden

Bees do have a smell, you know, and if they don't they should, for their feet are dusted with spices from a million flowers. - Ray Bradbury

Bees are an important part of our environment and our gardening practices and the plants we grow in our gardens have a major impact on their health and viability. Whether or not you grow and harvest edibles, or use honey, every garden can and should play a role in support of these vital pollinators. Wildlife pollinators that

Honey bees are vegetarians and search for nectar and pollen within a flight range which may extend two-to-six miles from their hive. The nectar is high in sugars and is their primary energy source. Meanwhile pollen is a protein and nutrient source used to raise their young. Both pollen and nectar find their way into honey. On cool winter mornings you may spot lethargic honey bees waiting for temperatures to rise so

they can forage. During really hot weather their hives must be cooled and they bring small droplets of water back to the hive and fan them with their wings to provide evaporative cooling.

To attract honey bees and other pollinators to your garden make sure you have a variety of plants that bloom throughout the seasons, preferably with colored petals and a strong scent. We find busy bees working blossoms on these plants in our garden: Sabal/



After pollination, the resulting seeds when planted will generate more Thai basil.



Even a cactus blossom attracts honey bees.

visit your flowers may include bees, wasps, beetles, ants, birds, bats, moths, flies and butterflies. Perhaps one-third of the human food supply depends upon insect pollination and honey bees do the yeoman's work when it comes to pollinating the flowers that develop into our fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. Over 50 major crops are either reliant upon honeybees for pollination or produce more plentifully when they are abundant.

cabbage palm, bulbine, saw palmetto, abelia, basil, oregano, rosemary, thyme, southern magnolia, various hollies, the highly fragrant almond bush, succulents, milkweed, cross vine, cactus, lavender, jasmine and numerous vegetables.

It is reported that a native vine, yellow jessamine, is toxic and has weakened colonies, but honey bees have more to worry about than toxic plants. Mockingbirds, dragonflies, toads, skunks and other insects that hide in blossoms



A bee harvests water from atop coral stone in our bird bath.

are predators. More insidious is humans' indiscriminate use of pesticides which kill bees through direct contact and contamination of their food supply. Researchers now believe insecticides may be a factor in the recent colony collapse disorder epidemic. Follow these rules when applying pesticides:

- Use them ONLY when needed and check the labels to avoid ones toxic to bees.
- Do not apply when plants are in bloom or when bees are most active; above 55 degrees F and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Early evening applications are best so chemicals can break down overnight.
- Do not contaminate water, including puddles, with pesticides.

Living with these indispensable pollinators is easy as they flit from flower to flower with an occasional sip from our birdbath. Along the way they unknowingly give life to our oh-so-local vegetables. Keeping them healthy keeps us healthy. ■

Hortus Oasis (FL26000315) in Winter Park is a boutique garden design company specializing in residential, commercial and specialty gardens. Stephen is a registered landscape architect and Kristin is a certified landscape designer. Contact them at 407.622.4886/ garden@hortus oasis.com

All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis