

## Why keep bees? Part 1



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Just the thought of having a real live beehive in their yard will send some people running and screaming. But there are those of us that welcome the little honeybees and their cousins. Maybe the first question should be: “Why are bees so important?”

Honeybees have been around for millions of years, long before humans. Early civilizations learned quickly that honeybees can provide a great source of food. In some cultures, they were even considered as gods. The ancient Egyptians believed that the bees were the tears of their sun god, Ra. The Egyptians also buried their dead with jars of honeycomb so that the departed would have food on their anticipated afterlife journey. They were also quick to note the correlation

between the bees and crop yields. Royalty at the time would appoint their own personal beekeepers so the coveted liquid gold would be available to them.

Today, after many years of study and research, we have determined that the honeybee is responsible for approximately one-third of all the food we consume. Bees pollinate over 70 percent of the food crops grown in the world. There are other pollinators, but none are as effective as the honeybee. Some foods are 100 percent dependent on bees and would cease to exist if they disappeared (e.g. almonds, apples, blueberries and avocados). Most other crops such as oranges, melons, strawberries, onions, okra, alfalfa, etc. would not disappear, but the yearly crop yields would be dramatically reduced.

Did you notice that alfalfa was on the list? We don't eat alfalfa directly, but much of our four-legged livestock does. So without bees, we could actually see a decrease in red meat and milk production as well. Grains made available for other meat sources such as pork and chicken would also be in short supply. So it's important to note that the disappearing honeybee can have far-reaching effects beyond the simple flowers and fruits.

There is a quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "If the bee disappears from the surface of the earth, man would have no more than four years to live." Whether or not Einstein actually said this is arguable, but the statement has some truth to it. Severe consequences will result from the bees' demise.

In part two of my article, we'll talk about the benefits of beekeeping. Look for that in next month's issue.

***For more information, please visit us at [browardbees.org](http://browardbees.org).***λ

*Dan Novak is treasurer of the Broward Beekeepers Association and presents to schools, private groups and at public events. He is a member of a local team that performs bee rescues and is working on his master rating in the University of Florida Master Beekeeper Program. Novak got his start in beekeeping when he was asked to eradicate a bee colony living quietly in a fence. After seeing how calm and gentle they were, he decided to adopt them instead.*

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## Green Excellence

Honey of a hobby



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Last month, I told you a little about bees and their benefits to the environment. But let's get back to the original question: "Why do we keep bees?" Beekeeping is possibly one of the most interesting and rewarding activities in which a person can engage. Here are some of the benefits:

**Pollination:** Hives provide a source of local pollinators for your yard as well as others nearby.

**Honey:** Bees provides a natural source of pure, raw honey.

**Entertainment:** Simply observing the bees coming and going from the hive with different colored pollens can be enjoyable.

**Education:** Put a window in the hive so you can witness communication, egg laying, comb building, honey making, birth, etc.

**Stress relief:** Watching your bees' activities or working with them can help you keep focused and your mind off other things.

**Healthy lifestyle:** Many beekeepers keep bees for their own health reasons. The hive provides a sort of mini pharmacy.

**Gifts:** Hive products can make for thoughtful gifts. Everything from the hive is 100 percent natural.

**Environment:** Managed hives are one of the biggest tools available to keep Florida relatively free from the more aggressive strains of Africanized honeybees. The increased presence of the calmer European strains keeps the gene pool diluted.

Getting started is relatively inexpensive and easy. Care and maintenance of a few hives requires very little time; just an hour or two per month per hive is all it takes.

If you can't keep bees but you enjoy the honey, please buy from a local beekeeper. Not only do you help support their noble efforts, but you will get a much better product. Honey from local hives (within a few miles of your residence) will contain the pollens that you are exposed to on a daily basis. You can actually experience the taste differences as the seasons change. Commercial honeys are often imported from out of the state as well as out of the country. The honey is processed in various ways and it can lose critical pollens and enzymes and has fewer health benefits. In addition, most commercial apiaries are located near farming communities where pesticide and herbicide use can be quite high.

The state of Florida has classified beekeeping as a farming activity and thus is a protected and regulated activity under the Department of Agriculture. You are permitted by the state to engage in beekeeping unless otherwise prohibited by a homeowners association or other deed or lease restrictions.

So, when you really think about it, why not keep bees?

In the third part of this series, I'll discuss some of the factors that have led to the global decline in the honeybee population.

Visit us at [browardbees.org](http://browardbees.org).

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## Colony collapse; bees in decline



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There is growing concern over the decline of honeybee colonies, also known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Is this something we should be worried about? You bet we should! As mentioned in my previous articles, bees have a very important role in the food supply chain. Any major disruption, such as the disappearance of the bee, can and will cause dramatic, far-reaching consequences.

So why are honeybee colonies on the decline? Every year, through natural attrition, we can expect to lose about 14 to 18 percent of our honeybee colonies. This is a normal winter's loss, as colonies cannot self-perpetuate forever. Over the years, losses have slowly increased; for 2014, there was an incredible 43 percent loss, according to the latest AIA/USDA report. The answer as to why this happened is not a simple one. There is a lot of finger pointing, but in reality, the cause is not singular. Corporations that produce the pesticides and herbicides, farmers and seed

producers that apply these chemicals, beekeepers who ignore best management practices and us, the end consumer, all take part of the blame.

Colony Collapse Disorder has no true root cause or scientific explanation, but is suspected to result from a combination of weakened health combined with overuse of agrochemicals. Providing bees with artificial food sources, such as high-fructose corn syrup or mono-diets, will cause stress and lower immunity, resulting in poor overall health of the bees.

In addition, leading agricultural corporations produce chemicals to kill pesky plants and insects. Most of these toxins are nonselective and more research needs to be done in situations when these chemicals are applied in combinations rather than individually, which is a common practice by applicators to save time and money. The bees, in a weakened state, fail to thrive. Even properly mixed and applied chemical products can be deadly. The bees can become disoriented, interfering with their ability to find their way home, or they bring home the chemicals and share with others inside the hive. This is in addition to their natural enemies such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, predators and parasites.

Let's help bees thrive and, in turn, help ourselves. Before using any chemical products on your landscaping, read the label thoroughly. Always mix according to instructions. Even though two chemicals may each be labeled as safe around bees, combining them can create a toxic cocktail. Herbicides can kill bees as well. If you can't keep bees, then plant bee-friendly flowers.

*And lastly, if you have unwanted bees, don't kill them! Please contact the Broward Beekeepers Association at 812.233.4483 or visit [browardbees.org](http://browardbees.org). We are also in need of vacant land to place rescued colonies.*

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