To Bee or not to Bee

Have you ever wondered why bees are declining? As a gardener would you like to increase the yield of your fruits and vegetables by improved pollination? Have you ever considered becoming a beekeeper?

These questions and more will be answered at the next OSUE Brown County Master Gardener lecture program simply titled, “Bees”.

The Master Gardeners in partnership with the Brown County Beekeepers Associations will discuss a number of bee related topics on November 13th from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Mt. Orab campus of Southern State Community College. Remember that all garden seminars are free and open to the public.

Dr. Mike McHenry, president of the Brown County Beekeepers, will present a program on “An Introduction to Beekeeping”. A show and tell on various types of beekeeping equipment will also be presented.

As humans, approximately one in three bites of food we take requires the services of a pollinator. Insect pollinated fruits and vegetables provide most of the vitamins and minerals we require in our daily diet. Pollinators are critical to the lives of wildlife as well, from birds to bears.

Pollinators are also critical to our well-being in that they are responsible for many of the beautiful flowering plants and trees in our gardens.

The decline in pollinators can be traced to several causes. Among them is the loss of habitat, diseases, pollution and the use of pesticides. What can we do to help? Consider the following:

1} Provide a variety of plants as food sources for bees. Plant large clusters of the same type of plant and stagger the bloom period so there is food throughout the year, especially in the late summer and fall.
2} Limit your use of pesticides, especially neonicotinoids, which are highly toxic to honey bees.
3} Provide shelter for native bees, leave some dead trees and plants on your property for wild bees to nest in. Leave some ground undisturbed for ground nesting bees.
4} Provide a clean source of shallow water. This may be a pond or small-scale water feature.
Adequate pollination is critical to some plants, without the help of pollinators like bees; the plant would be incapable of producing fruit. In many agricultural settings native pollinators are no longer available, so honey bees are brought to fields to ensure pollination takes place.

Various agricultural regions throughout the United States are very dependent on pollinators. Washington and Oregon state are large producers of a variety of fruits, vegetables, berries, and flower seeds. In 2008 the value of these pollinator-dependent crops from these two states alone was nearly 3 billion dollars. Maine with 60,000 acres of blueberries valued at 75 million dollars a year, New Hampshire and Vermont with 10,000 acres of apple production valued at 30 million dollars a year, and in the Midwest, Wisconsin’s cranberry industry has 18,000 acres of cranberry bogs, employs 7000 people and adds $350 million to the states economy.

The loss of bees would not be the end of man kind, but it would be the loss of life as we know it. We would not enjoy the wide variety of fruits and vegetables at a reasonable cost, nor would we have the abundance of plants and animals that we enjoy throughout the year.

So, on November 13, come and join us to learn more about how such a small creature can have such a big impact on our lives and how you can help them!

Submitted by Gary Keuffer
OSUE Brown County Master Gardener Volunteer