

What is Bee Health? And Why Should You Care?



Image via [Pexels](#)

It's been more than a decade since we first started hearing about bees mysteriously disappearing. At the time, we didn't know bee health would become a top concern for the entire world. But over the past 10 years, it has continuously dominated headlines. Congress has passed legislation banning certain types of pesticides. Corporations have launched "save the bees" initiatives. Commercial beekeepers have taken a long, hard look at best beekeeping practices. And private citizens have responded in kind.

From avid gardeners to modern conservationists to elementary school students, everyone is still talking about bees: why they are leaving, where they are going, why we need them, and how we can help them.

Why are bees leaving?

Experts agree that a phenomenon called [Colony Collapse Disorder](#) is the culprit. What they can't agree on is the root cause. The list of possibilities is long, ranging from chemical contamination of food stores or pesticide poisoning to insufficient genetic diversity or infection by pathogens or parasites. More likely, colony collapse is due to the simultaneous occurrence of more than one of these known issues.

Where are bees going?

Hives that fall victim to colony collapse are almost always devoid of dead bees, so it makes sense to ask where exactly all those bees end up. Most experts agree the bees are dying but, again, there is [no real consensus](#) as to why. Scientists say the bees' natural navigational instincts are affected. In short, the insects leave the hive to find food, and they never make their way back. This explains why the queen, along with a new brood of honey bee larvae and a small number of worker bees, are all that remains of affected hives.

Why do we need bees?

The main reason bees are important to humans is that they are used for large-scale [pollination](#) of commercial crops. As pollinators, bees transfer pollen and seeds from one flower to another, fertilizing the plant so it can grow and produce food. This lone act ensures at least 30 percent of the world's crops survive and thrive. But honey bees also contribute to the economy, as commercial beekeepers and farmers depend on them. Furthermore, they help keep the natural world balanced by pollinating wild plants and playing an important part of the food pyramid.

How can we help bees?

In recent years, honey bee populations have actually been on the rise. In spite of Colony Collapse Disorder and continued bee losses on the commercial level, private citizens have [responded](#) to the news that bees are in trouble. Honey lovers are forgoing the store-bought variety in favor of locally-harvested honey, in turn helping local beekeepers grow more bees. Nature lovers of all ages are planting what have become known as "bee gardens," in which they dedicate a corner of their yard to growing the flowers bees love most using pre-cultivated seed kits purchased from the local hardware store or acquired free of charge from bee advocacy groups. Furthermore, beekeeping is coming back into fashion as a fun and beneficial pastime, with people of all walks of life investing their time and money to become the next wave of beekeepers. If you want to give beekeeping a try, learn more about [gardening do's and don'ts](#) as well as what makes a garden most [friendly to our bee friends](#).

In other words, bee health is a [big deal](#). Bees are more than just a summertime nuisance, determined to steal a sip of your sweet tea or a lick of your watermelon. So, even if you're not quite ready to set up a hive in your own backyard, it's up to each of us to stay informed of the situation and, if we can, find a way to contribute to their continued well-being.