



Organic matters
Household pesticides

Give bees a chance



We want the Government to ban a group of agricultural insecticides implicated in bee decline. The same chemicals can also be found in our own homes and gardens.

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Bee decline is a worldwide phenomenon, and it appears that we could be heading towards a global devastation of honey bee numbers. In the UK alone, beekeepers report a loss of one in three bee colonies. This has serious consequences for worldwide food security, because bees are our most important pollinators and play a vital role in the food chain – it is estimated that one third of human food supplies depend on bee pollination. Bees are therefore like the ‘canary in the coal mine’ – their deaths are a warning to us all that the health of the planet is under threat.

There may be no single reason why bee populations are declining so dramatically; a huge amount of research is being done worldwide into the causes of bee colony collapse. However, one of the major causes is undoubtedly the spread of industrial-scale farming. This has meant both a decrease in areas of wild flowers and other bee-friendly sites, as well as a dramatic increase in the use of insecticides. In particular there is evidence that a group of insecticides called neonicotinoids are particularly linked to colony collapse. These chemicals were first used in agriculture in the mid-1990s – exactly the time when colony collapse seems to have started. A report from Buglife (The Invertebrate Conservation Trust) reviewed all available evidence and found independent research to suggest that neonicotinoids have an effect at a sublethal level, meaning they don't kill the bees outright but impact upon their ability to function and their immune systems. This makes them less resilient and more susceptible to disease. However, Bayer, the company that produces most of these chemicals, doesn't fully test for this in its research. The report concludes that EU – and by extension, UK – safety information does not adequately take into account the impact of sublethal doses of these pesticides on bees.

The evidence is strong enough that neonicotinoids have been banned or suspended in some European countries (France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia). We've been campaigning for the UK Government to follow suit, and last year launched an online petition calling for a ban on neonicotinoids. Since its launch we've collected over 20,000 signatures, and once a new Secretary of State for the Environment is in post following the election we will be submitting the petition and keeping the pressure up for a ban.

Close to home

As neonicotinoids are primarily used in agriculture, the most powerful action individuals can take to protect bees is to buy sustainably



Neonicotinoid pesticides used in domestic garden products have been implicated in bee deaths

Find out more

You can read our letters to retailers online at www.soilassociation.org/bees.aspx

produced, organic food, where these pesticides aren't used. What's more, the nature of organic farming leads to more complex crop rotations. This in turn provides a greater diversity of plants and habitats for bees to forage and thrive on. However, this is not a problem confined to the farm. Neonicotinoids can be found in many domestic gardening products on sale in UK supermarkets, hardware stores and garden centres. We've identified some of the commonest products containing these chemicals and it goes without saying that their use should be avoided. The table over the page shows some common products found in shops like B&Q and Wilkinsons. The table is not exhaustive, but it illustrates how

What is organic gardening?

An organic gardener tries to work in harmony with nature, to minimise consumption and waste and to continually replenish any resources the garden consumes. Organic gardening begins with attention to the soil and relies on regular additions of organic matter, usually in the form of domestic compost. When working well, an organic garden is a holistic system and pests are controlled by biological means. Beneficial predator insects, such as ladybirds and spiders as well

as some nematodes, keep pest numbers in check. The rotation of annuals around the garden ensures pest populations and diseases don't get a chance to become established. Organic systems need some pests in order to provide food for predators, but if numbers do get out of control, there are non-chemical alternatives. For instance, for aphids or whitefly you can use a soft soap spray, while scale insects might need to be rubbed off by hand.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES



easy it is for consumers to unwittingly buy and start spreading these chemicals around their gardens.

Raise awareness

Supporting organic farming and using organic techniques in our gardens are important actions to protect bees. We also need to raise public awareness of the dangers these domestic products pose. You can help bee populations by asking friends and family to avoid these products. On the back of our shopping trips we have written to the chief executives of B&Q, Wilkinsons and Wyevale, raising the issue of these products and asking them to withdraw any products containing neonicotinoids. Please support our efforts, either by writing to these stores directly – our letters are on our website – or by keeping an eye out for these products in your local DIY store or garden centre. If you find any neonicotinoids on sale, you could raise the issue with the manager and ask them to take the products off their shelves.

Bees are valuable to us not only because they allow us to produce food, but also because they are complex, beautiful creatures, who have existed happily for more than 100 million years. We need to do all we can to help protect these wonderful creatures before it's too late.

Take action

Here are just some of the ways that you can get involved in helping to protect honey bees

- Avoid neonicotinoid-based garden products and write to your local garden centre asking them to stock bee-friendly alternatives.
- Buy organic food and support sustainable farming techniques.
- Use organic techniques in your own garden. Use a wide variety of plants and don't be too tidy. Leave wild flowering plants in place – ivy is a particularly important source of winter food for bees.
- Take up beekeeping if you've got the space. There are some excellent courses available as part of our Organic Farm School programme, details of which are available at www.soilassociation.org/farmschool.aspx
- Write to your new MP asking them to put pressure on the Secretary of State at Defra to suspend the use of neonicotinoids, as France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia have already done.

PHOTO: ISTOCK



Bee killers

Neonicotinoids aren't just used in agriculture. The table below shows a selection of products used in homes and gardens. This table is not exhaustive – it simply shows products we found in a range of shops and websites. If you're buying any kind of pest control, check the ingredients – and avoid anything that contains Acetamiprid, Imidacloprid, Thiacloprid or Thiamethoxam.

| Product | Neonicotinoid | Shops | Websites |
|--|---------------|----------------|--|
| Westland Bug Attack | Thiamethoxam | Wickes, B&Q | www.selections.com |
| Westland Plant Rescue Bug Killer | Thiamethoxam | B&Q | |
| Baby Bio House Plant Insecticide | Thiacloprid | B&Q, Morrisons | www.bayergarden.co.uk |
| Provado Vine Weevil Killer | Thiacloprid | Wilkinsons | www.bayergarden.co.uk www.selections.com , www.wyevale.co.uk www.plantandlife.com |
| Bug Clear Ultra Vine Weevil Killer | Acetamiprid | Wilkinsons | |
| Bug Clear Ultra For Flowering Plants | Acetamiprid | Wilkinsons | |
| Bug Clear Gun! | Acetamiprid | Wilkinsons | www.wyevale.co.uk |
| Provado Ultimate Bug Killer Spray | Imidacloprid | | www.bayergarden.co.uk www.selections.com www.wyevale.co.uk www.plantandlife.com |
| Bayer Provado Systemic Ultimate Bug Killer | Thiacloprid | | www.wyevale.co.uk |
| Provado Lawn Grub Killer | Imidacloprid | | www.bayergarden.co.uk www.wyevale.co.uk www.plantandlife.com |
| Provado Lawn Grub Killer (for smaller lawns) | Imidacloprid | | www.selections.com www.plantandlife.com |
| Provado Ultimate Bug Killer Ready to Use | Thiacloprid | Wilkinsons | www.bayergarden.co.uk www.selections.com www.wyevale.co.uk www.plantandlife.com |
| Provado Ultimate Bug Killer Concentrate | Thiacloprid | Wilkinsons | www.bayergarden.co.uk www.selections.com www.wyevale.co.uk |