

Bees are the new Black

By Vanessa Kwiatkowski

In recent years there has been increasing interest in bees and beekeeping worldwide. In Melbourne I'd like to think we've been influential in raising awareness about bees and the benefits they bring to an urban environment. Public interest in sustainability, local food production and issues of pollination - as well as love for honey bees and their welfare - contributes to a sense of community.

While the rest of the world struggles with up to 50% colony losses here in Australia we can be thankful for our geographic isolation. This has provided us with opportunity to be proactive in building an army of healthy bees before the devastating Varroa Mite gets here. When it finally does arrive shores it is expected that our wild colonies would be decimated (these ladies do a free pollination service which has been estimated to be worth up to \$1 billion in pollination) and managed hives will experience losses of up to 30%. It will be a sad day for Australia - expect the price of food to climb and your vegetable patch will not yield like it used to - enter hand pollinating!. Breeders who raise bees for export, supporting industries around the world, will suffer. Indeed even bees themselves have been noted to be utterly demoralised by the devastating effects of the Varroa Mite.

As the experience of other countries has shown this scenario may become our reality in times to come. One can see why we feel so passionate about re homing and saving unwanted colonies and swarms rather than destroying them. Bees' vital role in food production means that it is imperative for us all to look towards ways that we can help these hard working, industrious creatures. The more managed hives the better and why not utilise our city roof spaces and suburban backyards? Beautiful sweet honey is the reward for helping support bees in their work.

We've had an amazing journey since starting Melbourne City Rooftop Honey - initially a hobby project that has been so well received by the good people of Melbourne, it quickly took over our lives. Now 2 years down, 50 colonies have been re homed, over 300 individuals and businesses are eagerly waiting to get involved to help support the honey bee.

Here are a few examples of the types of places we've re homed bees - keeping them on balconies, roofs, garages, cool rooms and rooftop gardens. In principle it is the same as keeping bees on the ground, though it is most important to consider safety for you and your bees. In many ways rooftop beekeeping has many pluses for you, your neighbors and your bees.

