

WHY DO YOU WANT TO KEEP BEES?

Why would Canadians, many of them living in an urbanized environment, want to get into beekeeping - essentially a complex form of animal husbandry that takes vigilance, knowledge and a good back?

Hiveworld.ca hears from many would-be backyard beekeepers, and time and again we hear the same reasons for their passionate interest in these fascinating creatures.

First is a desire to give honeybees a fighting chance. Everyone has heard the news items about bees being under threat from climate variability, loss of foraging habitat, pests/diseases and man-made chemicals on our front lawns, municipal lands and farm fields.

We applaud this desire and those who want to do something about it. Settled environments can be among the most diverse and productive for all manner of wildlife. Just take a look at our urban forests, our river valley parklands, the backyards that bloom with all manner of bee-friendly flowers and vegetables. The same is true for suburban homes and acreages, and obviously for the large farms that are moving to new paradigms of **sustainable agriculture**.

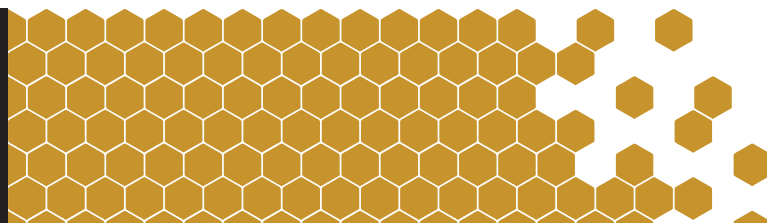
We need our honeybees. According to **Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming**, there are more honeybees than other types of bee and pollinating insects, so it is the world's most important pollinator of food crops. It is estimated that one third of the food that we consume each day relies on pollination mainly by bees, but also by other insects, birds and bats. Many domestic and imported fruits and vegetables require pollination.

Examples include avocados, soybeans, asparagus, broccoli, celery, squash, and sunflowers for oil, cucumbers, citrus fruit, peaches, kiwis, cherries, cranberries and melons. For crops such as blueberries

and almonds, the honey bee plays an essential role in pollination of commercial crops, with around 80% of the US crop said to be dependent on honey bees. Honey bees can also pollinate clover and alfalfa, which are fed to cattle, so there are implications for the meat and dairy industry too.

And that is not to mention the huge range of manufactured food products made from all these ingredients. In addition, honey bees play a significant role in the pollination of other important crops such as cotton, flax and canola. And there's also a number of valuable non-food products produced by the honeybee, such as beeswax used in cleaning and beauty products .

Honey is also good for you. It is thought to help with everything from sore throats and digestive disorders to skin problems and hay fever. Honey has antiseptic properties and was historically used as a dressing for



wounds and a first aid treatment for burns and cuts. The natural fruit sugars in honey – fructose and glucose – are quickly digested by the body. This is why sportsmen and athletes use honey to give them a natural energy boost.

A single hive can produce 50-100 pounds (22.5-45 kg) of honey a year. The average foraging bee brings home a total of about **one-twelfth of a teaspoon** of honey-producing nectar - and then she dies after only six weeks. The moral is that every tiny contribution ensures the survival of the hive. Just think how that applies to the small single hive in your yard, and your contribution to the survival of our species and our planet.

The second driving reason to manage a hive is honey - not necessarily to get rich quick (the professionals might chuckle at that), but to grow your own safe, sustainable food. It doesn't get more local, plus you can be sure your honey hasn't been watered down, mixed with corn syrup, brought in by container ship from who-knows-where, or treated to any form of pharmaceutical alchemy.

Your own honey, extracted or on the comb, is a treat for the table and for gifts to friends - not to mention the wax, propolis and surplus bees that can be gifted or sold, depending on local regulations.

There are many more reasons to keep bees. Some folks are just fascinated by the workings of the hive mind, by the communal behaviours and the ability to withstand extreme conditions. Some write books about the spiritual connection between this manifestation of an awesome universe and our own desire for harmony with nature and community.

What's your reason for wanting to keep bees? Send us your thoughts!

And remember - there's always good help and advice from your friends at **Hiveworld.ca** whenever you need it. Also - follow us on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **YouTube** and **Instagram**.

