



## Gardening Naturally: Consider Beekeeping BY GARY LOCHTE



For several years, this column has discussed common sense methods of growing a great garden. Perhaps now is a good time for you to expand your knowledge and elevate your organic garden to the next level by introducing "beekeeping".

You may not know that since 2006, beekeepers have recorded the death of honeybee populations at increasingly rapid rates. According to a recent article from [WWW.GLOBAL RESEARCH CA](http://WWW.GLOBAL RESEARCH CA), "*Recent harsh winters that stay freezing cold well into spring have been instrumental in decimating the honeybee population in Iowa by up to 70% (<http://www.thegazette.com/2014/03/23/winter-stings-iowas-honey-bee-population-2>) as well as the other historically high yielding honey states – the Dakotas, Montana, Minnesota. The northern Plains and Mid-western states that have regionally always produced the nation's most honey have been severely hurt by the long harsh winters in the last couple years. Florida as the third largest honey producer and especially California always among the top producers have been hit especially hard by decreasing bee colony populations. In 2006 when the problem of bee loss first was noticed, California was right up at the top with North Dakota producing nearly twice as much honey as the next state South Dakota but its bee numbers have incurred such heavy losses that in 2011, though still second, California's honey production fell by nearly half (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/191996/top-10-honey-producing-us-states/>) in just six years. The recent severe drought in California has become an additional factor driving both its honey yield and bee numbers down as less rain means less flowers available to pollinate.*"

Bees pollinate countless essential crops which people and animals survive on. Bottom line: declining bee populations means declining food supplies. It is so critical beginning in 2007, the US CONGRESS passed laws governing what

they call HONEY BEE COLLAPSE DISORDER. But as is often the case, the CONGRESS missed the point entirely, and threw our money at the culprits instead of the cure.

We can take the cure into our own hands by bringing beekeeping into our back yards. Beekeeping is local, easy and fun to learn, and is relatively inexpensive. You **can** raise bees, and you should.

Where do you start? Start local. Right now TRACTOR SUPPLY COMPANY has a beekeeping promotion on-line. You can pre-order bees, hives, and all the supplies needed to have a hive of your own. They even have a simple starter kit that comes with everything you need, all for under \$100.

I also found a helpful website which is a 1-stop shop for beekeeping. Check out <https://beebuilt.com/pages/beekeepingforbeginners>.

You might also enjoy leaning about the Texas A&M University TEXAS MASTER BEEKEEPER PROGRAM. The program is described as "An educational program designed to increase the knowledge and skill level of participating beekeepers. The program is a five-year (minimum) beekeeper training and certification program provided by the Texas Apiary Inspection Service in association with the Texas Beekeepers Association."

Your local county extension agent is a great source of information and help should you decide to investigate further. For information, contact the Bandera office at 830.796.7755

