



BEYOND PESTICIDES

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[On National Honey Bee Day, Ask Retailers to Stop Selling Bee-Killing Products](#) »

[Garden Centers Sell Bee-Attractant Plants with Pesticide Residues Toxic to Bees](#)

(*Beyond Pesticides*, August 15, 2013) Many “bee friendly” home garden plants sold at Home Depot (NYSE: HD), Lowe’s (NYSE: LOW) and other leading garden centers have been treated with pesticides shown to harm and kill bees, according to a pilot study released yesterday by Friends of the Earth-US, Beyond Pesticides, and others. Supporting organizations [sent a letter](#) yesterday –along with petitions signed by more than 175,000 people– to Lowe’s, Home Depot, Target and other top garden retailers, asking the stores to stop selling neonicotinoids and plants treated with the pesticides. A majority of the UK’s largest garden retailers, including Homebase, B&Q and Wickes, have already stopped selling neonicotinoids.

[The pilot study](#), co-authored by the Pesticide Research Institute, found that 7 of 13 samples of garden plants purchased at top retailers in Washington DC, the San Francisco Bay Area and Minneapolis contain neurotoxic pesticides known as [neonicotinoids](#) that studies show harm or kill bees and other pollinators.

Neonicotinoids are a relatively new class of insecticides that share a common mode of action that affect the central nervous system of insects, resulting in paralysis and death. These systemic pesticides, which move through the plant’s vascular system and express themselves through pollen and nectar, include [imidacloprid](#), [acetamiprid](#), [clothianidin](#), [dinotefuran](#), nithiazine, [thiacloprid](#) and [thiamethoxam](#). A growing body of science has implicated neonicotinoids (neonics), which are applied to or incorporated into seeds for agricultural, ornamental and garden plants, as a key factor in [recent global bee die-offs](#). Beekeepers across the country reported losses of 40-90 percent of their bees last winter. [The European Union](#) (EU) is set to suspend the use of three neonicotinoid

pesticides later this year, after a [scientific review](#) by European Food Safety Authority found that neonicotinoids pose an unacceptably high risk to bees.

“The widespread use of bee-killing neonicotinoid pesticides reflects a failure of the highest magnitude by EPA’s regulatory system, which has allowed the continued poisoning of bees to the brink of extinction while the scientific data mounts and other countries take action,” said Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides. “In the absence of adequate regulation and congressional action, we turn to the marketplace for leadership in removing these deadly toxic chemicals and contaminated plants from U.S. commerce.”

“Our investigation is the first to show that so called ‘bee-friendly’ garden plants contain pesticides that can poison bees, with no warning to gardeners,” said Lisa Archer, director of the Food and Technology Program at Friends of the Earth-US. “Bees are essential to our food system and they are dying at alarming rates. Neonic pesticides are a key part of the problem we can start to fix right now in our own backyards.”

“The bees and beekeepers are telling us they cannot wait until EPA’s planned review of neonicotinoids in 2018—and neither can we,” said Nichelle Harriott, staff scientist at Beyond Pesticides. “Retailers, EPA and Congress need to step up their efforts to protect pollinators.”

Neonicotinoids are the most widely used class of insecticides in the world. Bees are exposed through multiple routes, including — as the pilot study highlights—common home garden plants. “The pilot study confirms that many of the plants sold in nurseries and garden stores across the U.S. have been pre-treated with systemic neonicotinoid insecticides, making them potentially toxic to pollinators,” said Timothy Brown, PhD, of the Pesticide Research Institute. “Unfortunately, these pesticides don’t break down quickly — they remain in the plants and the soil and can continue to affect pollinators for months to years after the treatment.”

The high percentage of contaminated plants and their neonicotinoid concentrations suggest that this problem is widespread, and that many home gardens have likely become a source of harm for bees. “Bees have enough troubles; there’s no need for home gardens to add to the problem,” said Emily Marquez, staff scientist at Pesticide Action Network. “Studies indicate that widespread use of systemic pesticides like neonicotinoids is contributing to major bee kills around the globe. And even at doses that don’t kill bees, neonics weaken bee immune systems and impair critical brain functions, making it hard for bees to find their food sources and return to the hive.”

“We must take immediate action to address this crisis. Europe has banned bee-harming pesticides, retailers in the UK are refusing to sell them, and stores like Home Depot and Lowe’s have a moral obligation to make the same commitment here in the U.S.,” said Lisa Archer. “In the meantime, gardeners should start their plants from untreated seeds or choose organic plants for their gardens.”

In addition to pressuring retailers, U.S. groups are calling for the government to restrict the use of neonics in the United States.

“While neonics may not be the only factor in bee die offs, they are a significant factor, and one that we can do something about. It’s time for EPA to step in and suspend use of these pesticides on bee-attractive plants,” said Larissa Walker, policy & campaign coordinator at the Center for Food Safety.

In the face of mounting evidence linking neonics to bee colony declines, and more than a million public comments urging swift protections for bees, the EPA has delayed action until 2018.

[Last month](#), U.S. Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D, Ore.) and John Conyers (D, Mich.) introduced the “[Save American’s Pollinators Act](#),” which seeks to suspend the use of neonics on bee-attractive plants until EPA reviews all of the available data, including field studies. [Please tell your member of Congress](#) to support the Save American’s Pollinator Act.

Rep. Blumenauer introduced the bill after [50,000 bumblebees died](#) in a Target parking lot in Wilsonville, Ore. when the neonic pesticide dinotefuran was applied to nearby trees. The bee massacre also prompted the Oregon Department of Agriculture to prohibit further cosmetic use of pesticides containing dinotefuran for the remainder of 2013.

In July, [37 million honeybees were reported dead](#) across a single farm in Ontario from the dust associated with planting neonic-treated corn seeds.

“The weight of accumulated evidence from scientists across Europe and North America shows that neonicotinoids harm honey bees, bumble bees, and other important pollinators,” said Scott Hoffman Black, executive director of the Xerces Society. “Swift action is needed by all sectors of society to reduce the prevalence of these insecticides in our environment. By phasing out their use, nurseries can play a leadership role in this change.”

Beyond Pesticides launched the [BEE Protective](#) campaign, a national public education effort supporting local action aimed at protecting honey bees and other pollinators from pesticides and contaminated landscapes on Earth Day of this year. BEE Protective includes a variety of [educational materials](#), including the [BEE Protective Habitat Guide](#), which provides information on creating native pollinator habitat in communities, eliminating bee-toxic chemicals, as well as advocacy tools. BEE Protective encourages municipalities, campuses, and homeowners to adopt [policies that protect bees and other pollinators](#) from harmful pesticide applications and create pesticide-free refuges for these beneficial organisms. In addition to scientific and regulatory information, BEE Protective also includes [a model community pollinator resolution](#) and a [pollinator protection pledge](#).

Let's [BEE Protective](#) and support a shift away from the use of these toxic chemicals by encouraging organic methods and sustainable land management practices in your home, campus, or community.

All unattributed positions and opinions in this piece are those of Beyond Pesticides.

Source: [Friends of the Earth-US](#)