

# Helping Your Garden Grow

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## Welcome the bees for better pollination

**N**ow that winter is in full swing and your garden is growing slowly you have some free time to be warm inside, dreaming of your spring garden. Take out your favorite seed catalogue and start planning new crops to experiment with next year. While thinking about your garden, think about planting something for the bees. You have probably heard that bee colonies have declined lately for many reasons. One important reason is lack of forage. A good healthy hive in the peak of spring can have up to 60,000 hungry bees, and their food is nectar and pollen from flowers.

You don't need to become a beekeeper in order to help the struggling honey bee population. The best thing you can do for them is provide food so that they can produce enough honey to survive the winter months. Come spring that colony can swarm (a new honey bee colony is formed when the queen leaves the colony with a large group of worker bees, a process called swarming) and become two colonies, which begins to build a strong local genetic stock of Napa honey bees.

It's important for everyone to get over thinking about bees making honey for us and remember that their very important ecological niche is pollination. Bees will feast on and pollinate many of the European annuals that grow in your garden already, such as cucumbers, squash, melons, peppers and sunflowers, but consider adding a few plants that really bring home the nectar. A few of my favorites are borage, tansy phacelia, thyme, mint, aster, echium, rosemary and lavender. If you want a bumper crop of produce next year and you have room for more flowering plants in your garden, welcome the honey bee.