

Most of us concerned about the plight of bees are now conscientiously choosing plants for our gardens that are good for bees. What we may not be aware of is that the very plants we are purchasing to help bees may have been treated with the same pesticides that have been killing or sickening bees worldwide— neonicotinoids.

Neonicotinoids or neonics are a group of systemic pesticides that are used on crops to control insects. When they are used as a seed coating or a drench, the insecticide enters the system of the plant and can be found in all parts of the plant – leaves, stem, flowers, and fruit. Insects feeding on any part of treated plants are affected.

The neonicotinoids widely used to prevent insect damage on crops have been recognized as dangerous to bees. Although bees are not the targets, they are attracted to the flowers of crops that have been treated. The bees ingest the neonics through nectar and take the pollen of the treated plants back to their hives to feed their young. Large doses of the pesticide will kill bees outright, but even very small doses of neonics, can cause bees to become disoriented, to experience memory loss or to lose their foraging ability. Honey bees are often unable to find their way back to the hive.

Those very same neonics that harm bees on crop plants may be present in the ornamental plants we purchase at nurseries and big box stores. Studies of plant material from a variety of retail sources have revealed the presence of neonics in plants offered for sale. Some growers use the pesticides on their ornamental stock as a control for insects just as farmers do on crops. And we purchase those plants for our bee gardens!

To reduce the danger to bees, many countries have banned the use of neonicotinoids, but there is no legislation banning the use of neonics on garden plants in Canada or the USA. The nurseries and plant producers, the sources of our plants, are free to use neonics on the plants they produce. Of course, we wouldn't choose plants for our bee gardens that contained harmful pesticides, but there is no way of knowing whether the plants we purchase have been treated with neonics or not.

*Here's where you and I come into the picture.*

The Ontario Horticultural Association has acted. OHA has written a letter to the main large box stores asking them to choose plants for sale that have not been treated with neonics and to label plants that have been treated.

You and I can act, too. We can ask our plant sources whether neonics have been used on the plants, and we can choose not to buy plants that have been treated with neonics. We can regulate the use of neonics with our purchasing decisions. Buy only bee-friendly plants this spring.

Here are some sites you may want to visit for more information:

<http://www.wired.com/2014/06/garden-center-neonicotinoids/>

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/Krischik-UofMN-PowerPoint.pdf>

<http://www.thecourier.co.uk/business/farming/scottish-study-claims-to-prove-pesticides-are-harming-bees-1.822577>

<http://www.xerces.org/neonicotinoids-and-bees/>

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2013/05/07/neonicotinoids-affect-bees.aspx>

<http://www.planetexperts.com/study-confirms-neonicotinoid-insecticides-impair-bee-brains/#sthash.00JDwuH9.dpuf>

You can also visit Carol's website about a program she co-developed to help pollinators, called Roadsides

<http://roadsides.caroldunk.com/>