

BEE-ING YOUR BEST

Bees — are they friend or foe to your business and your clients?

On the one hand, honeybees are nearly cartoonish creatures, absorbed with their work of diving into blossoms and the alchemy of honey production. Among greenhouse growers who practice controlled environment agriculture, bumblebees are useful for pollinating flowers that must yield berries or vegetables.

On the other hand, the stings are painful — and dangerous to those prone to allergic reactions. Wild bees not only swarm in easy-to-move loose clumps but also can infest buildings. Professional beekeeping is real work that can distract from your core business. Unless you're involved in seed production that uses open pollination, I can't imagine how they would help the work of an ornamental plant business.

But bees do like flowers, and many customers like seeing bees, in addition to butterflies. I'm just one consumer, but let me tell you that one of the most exciting things that happened to me in early April involved bees and flowers. I noticed bees on a cast-off hyacinth of yesteryear (I save the bulbs and replant them outdoors) that had bloomed again. I realized that the bees were waking up and desperate for nectar, so I hauled all the new Easter plants my wife had purchased outside to the deck. Pretty soon, I had a cloud of bees around the plants!

CORPORATE ACTION

Well, as many of you know, more than a year ago Walmart rolled out a big initiative of pro-pollinator policies. Some of those commitments included warning its food suppliers away from major pesticides and labeling pollinator-friendly plants in its stores.

The company recently shared some information about how that's gone over the last year and how they tried to go the extra mile to care for bees.

"At stores around the country, bees have made their homes in places as diverse as soffits and garden center shelving," Walmart Corporate Affairs wrote in a story for the company newsroom. "Instead of exterminating them, our associates flag the colony, and whenever possible, work with an accredited wildlife vendor to humanely remove and relocate the bees — often placing them with a local beekeeper who can help ensure the colony continues doing what nature designed it to do: pollinate things."

Kudos to the retail giant for those efforts. I know many of you, our readers, are also supporting pollinators — not only by labeling pollinator-friendly plants (we saw this at CAST) but in using bee-friendly products. I recently got a release about a peroxyacetic acid product (BioSafe's OxiDate 5.0) being proven to not harm pollinators while controlling fungi, algae and other pathogens — that's just one example of a bee-friendly product.

In celebrating its 60th anniversary in May, the Horticultural Research Institute's Harvey Cotten discussed "qualifying plant benefits," including pollinator appeal, as tools to sell plants to consumers.

"We need to get our people, whether that's the greenhouse side, the landscape side, or the retail side, the ammunition they need to show the benefits of plants as more than just being something pretty," Cotten said.



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