

The birds and saving the bees

By Sarah Sobanski

One summer bees moved onto our property. A half dozen beautiful, intricate honeycomb nests dotted a portion of our forests. It just so happened that that area also hosted the trail that led to the driveway from the house. I, being terrified of insects on principle and having never been stung by a bee, refused to walk through the tiny thunder cloud to get to my car. It just was not going to happen. Not long after that firm, resounding declaration, a friend grabbed me by the hand and pulled me right down that trail. It was enthralling, incredible really. I didn't bother them. They didn't bother me. If I hadn't been being dragged I would have thought it was calming, as if surrounded by white noise ? the meditation kind.

Bees don't frighten me anymore. They aren't like wasps that charge you head on. (Wasps *do* do that. My father swallowed one while on the phone with my grandmother last year.) Bees are quite friendly. I wish they'd come back to our property. Unfortunately, that's not likely to happen.

If you've seen a box of Honey Nut Cheerios lately you'll have noticed that its mascot isn't on the front. There's a dotted outline where he used to be. This is because according to the brand and Dr. Marla Spivak ? a distinguished McKnight professor in the Department of Entomology at the University of Minnesota and identified by TED Talks as a bee scholar ? bee populations across North America have been in serious decline.?

As you might have guessed, bees are pretty important. In a terrifying exhibition of how important, Honey Nut Cheerios brought a bunch of people to a grocery store. They took all the foods that wouldn't be around without bees. The results were empty and barren shelves. According to the brand, ?one in three bites of food you eat is made possible by bees and other pollinators.?

One of the main contributors to bee decline is loss of habitat. In an attempt to grow a friendlier environment for bees, Honey Nut Cheerios is handing out 500 wildflower seeds to anyone who asks for them. It's as easy as clicking [here](#)] and signing up for them. The goal is to give away more than 100 million seeds to Canadians. So let's get planting.

When I think of planting wildflowers, I think of great big flowery bush messes. I can do messy, throw seeds everywhere gardening. I see wildflowers out and about. If they can grow out there without my help, how hard could it be to grow them with my help? Don't answer that.

To figure it out, I got in touch with one of our local botanical gardening experts, Carol Dromey of No. 5 Bee in Maynooth. Dromey told me that most flowers are easy to grow given the right conditions. Got it: sun, water, soil ? not in that order. She said it's also important to pay attention to proper planting times.

?With a little planning, (which is kind of fun to do when you get into the actual act of doing it)?it is pretty easy to be successful with wild flowers or bee forage flowers,? wrote Dromey after I had sent her an email of the seeds being provided by Honey Nut Cheerios for her expertise. ?My personal opinion is to grow these seeds in a well prepared cultivated flower bed in full sun or somewhere that gets at least six hours of sun a day.?

So it sounds like it's easier to actually go about planting the seeds instead of frolicking and throwing them out into the forests as was my original plan ? because why wouldn't you want flowers as far as the eye can see? Dromey talked me out of it.

?Undertaking a wildflower field is another story? It is quite an extensive job and requires some longer term planning with either a tractor or rototiller to prepare the field in advance? a smaller project would be less daunting for more gardeners and far more rewarding.?

She did agree with me, however, that saving the bees and helping pollinators is a great idea.

?One area that I do believe is very important for people to pay close attention to is pesticides and neonicotinoids (neonicotinoids are often used in greenhouses directly in the soil of many flowering plants and are not detectable so disclosure is very important). Please encourage people to query retailers whether the plants they sell have been subjected to neonicotinoid use as these are very harmful to our beneficiary insects especially the sensitive honey bee.?

We owe it to our buzzing friends to ask these questions, I think. They really are the most incredible little creatures.

?Education is our biggest ally here,? Dromey finished in her email. She recommended the Spikenard Farm Honey Bee Sanctuary website for other easy-to-grow flowers to invite more friends around.

Get buzzing.