

## The New Buzz on Bumble Bees

A unique new Bumble Bee hive for the home garden was launched at the Ellerslie Flower Show last February. Visitors to the show saw these hives in action and discovered how exciting it is to have their very own hive.

Home gardener's hives come pre-loaded to start with about 50 workers and a queen. Donna Hall from Zonda Beneficials says "Bumble bees just look after themselves. You do not collect their honey. All you do is watch them pollinate your flowers, fruit & vegetables and watch the colony grow".

This is what makes them so fascinating as well as being educational. They are passive friends for the home gardener and their buzzing sound is soothing. And let's face it – people just love Bumble bees!

The decline of mankind's food crop pollinators is now well recognised. It is estimated that one spoonful of food in three of what we eat depends solely on honeybees to have pollinated the original food crop.

Today you do not have to look far to find evidence that New Zealand is well into gear in the promotion of various "rescue remedy" techniques to both stabilise bee population numbers and more importantly grow them.

Federated Farmers are well on with the promotion of flowering trees for bees and companies such as Wildforage in conjunction with The National Beekeepers Association and Wildflower World have extensively promoted wildflower mixes as superior nutrition sources. Added to this are the many people marketing honey bee hives to anybody with the time and space to look after them.

Equally important in the pollination equation and perhaps somewhat overlooked is the Bumble bee. In fact they are often regarded as perhaps the most efficient pollinator out of the the whole lot, bees, butterflies, insects, birds one and all. Why Bumble bees?

# Because of their size they carry a bigger load of pollen to transfer to the stigma of flowers and will visit more flowers per hour than any other pollinators.

# Work from daylight to dusk and in wet cold inclement weather conditions.

# Are extremely efficient in extracting pollen from "hard to access flowers"

# Will forage in confined areas, within a small radial area and are far less aggressive than their honey bee counterparts.

# Work in total harmony with honey bees and all their pollinator friends.

Three experts from three companies have got together to launch and promote the Bumble bee as the ideal pollinator/education tool for home gardeners and schools. Donna Hall of Zonda Beneficials Auckland has overseen the development of a unique cost effective hive well proven over the years in commercial food crop pollination here.

Toby Patton a beekeeper from Te Puna has amassed extensive husbandry knowledge on both honey and Bumble bees, essential in understanding how the Bumble bee hive can work at home. He says "It's watching them buzzing full tilt in and out of flowers that make you realise why they are most surely Mother Nature's best flower pollinator."

Finally Geoff Brunsten of Wildflower World in Tauranga, in conjunction with his international wildflower seed suppliers, has put together a well proven wildflower seed mix as the best floral food source to sow to feed and keep bees at home. This wildflower mix contains 16 species designed to bring up to 3 months continuous colour to the home garden. A perfect smorgasbord of flower food.

All three promoters are quick to say this is not about underestimating the essential role and work that honey bees play in the ecosystem. After all where would we be without honey or indeed where there are no Bumble bees? It's about offering a unique educational tool where families and schoolchildren can observe/study how these bees work and grow with the minimum of aftercare. And Bumble bees are not aggressive, making them ideal for the home garden.

A wildflower mix to sow nearby to where the hive is to be located is sold as the first starting point for the best food source to feed and keep the bees at or close to home. Once the wildflower bed starts to flower orders are placed for a hive and these are couriered overnight.

A new and unique "Rescue Remedy" for Bumble bees at home has begun. Gardener's hives can be ordered from Zonda Beneficials phone 09 2363700 . Full instructions on placement of hives and their maintenance are supplied. Wildflower seeds can be obtained from [www.wildflowerworld.com](http://www.wildflowerworld.com)

Hives comes self-contained loaded with bees. A wax outer box holds an easy-to view inner hive. A slider door in front controls bees going in and out.



Place hives in a quiet, cool, sheltered area, slightly elevated, with open flight path.



Bumble Bees loving our red poppies



Phacelia tanacetifolia is another favourite of both Bumble bees and honey bees.



Wildflower World's Bees Birds and Butterflies wildflower seed mix as on display at the Ellerslie Flower Show in Christchurch.



By Geoff Brunsten  
Wildflower World - Tauranga