

Honeybee health

Bee-friendly steps we can all take to keep pollinators happy

by SHERI FLIES



© SUMIKOPHOTO / STOCK.ADOBE.COM



© COSTCO PHOTO STUDIO

Sheri Flies is Costco assistant vice president of global sustainability and compliance.



Much has been written about the plight of honeybees and other pollinators, whose populations have significantly declined in recent years. Scientists point to the “four P’s”: parasites, pathogens, pesticides and poor nutrition. This is important to all of us, because honeybees pollinate about a third of the food we eat, including fruits, nuts and vegetables.

What role does Costco play in supporting pollinator health? And what about you? Here’s a look.

Pest management. Costco has adopted a global pollinator health policy for the garden plants, fruits and vegetables we sell in our warehouses. The policy encourages our suppliers to phase out neonicotinoids and chlorpyrifos (two common pesticides) and to adopt integrated pest management practices that reduce the use of chemicals. Our buyers seek to partner with suppliers who share this commitment to pollinator health.

Research support. We are funding programs through a nonprofit honeybee research organization, Project Apis m. This group focuses on backing efforts that fight varroa mites, support U.S. beekeepers with the latest and best management practices, encourage the use of diverse cover crops for healthy bee forage and provide scholarship grants for Ph.D.-level research.

Costco’s funding—\$3.5 million to date—comes through a portion of our Kirkland Signature™ honey sales.

Supporting bee-friendly practices. Our buyers work with our fresh produce and almond suppliers to encourage the planting of buffer zones to benefit pollinators. One example is our support of a Project Apis m. program, Seeds for Bees, which puts blooming plants back in agricultural areas. These provide diverse nutrition for bees and improve soil health.

Organic fruits and vegetables. Costco is working hard to meet consumer demands for organic products, and our buyers bring them in whenever possible. Organic farming practices, with a focus on natural pest management, are good for honeybees.

Home garden products. We have discontinued selling garden products with glyphosate in our warehouses and are offering more organic alternatives to pesticides for home gardeners.

I encourage you to review Costco’s Sustainability Commitment for more details on pollinator health. The commitment is available at Costco.com; scroll to the bottom of the page under “About Us.” These efforts are explained in two sections: “Kirkland Signature Honey Program” and “Environmental Impacts.” ■

Helping out

Besides purchasing products that support bee health, you can take these steps at home:

- Plant a bee garden. These can be in places as

small as a balcony or a parking strip.

- Make your garden bee-friendly. Certain plants and flowers are good for both bees and your garden.
- Support your local

beekeeper. The easiest way to do this is by buying locally made honey and beeswax.

Source: *The Honeybee Conservancy* (thehoneybeeconservancy.org)