

CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUYING MANAGED BEES

Are you thinking of buying managed bees, such as leafcutter bees, mason bees, or honey bees? Here are some questions to ask yourself first.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO BUY MANAGED BEES?

To help “save the bees” and increase local pollinator populations? Keep in mind that:

- Honey bees aren’t native to North America, and that they are a domesticated animal. Therefore increasing honey bees in order to help “save the bees” is similar to the idea of keeping chickens in order to help “save the songbirds”.
- There is evidence that honey bees can out-compete/remove food from the native bees. This means increasing the number of honey bees will actually mean there is less food available for our native bees and this could result in fewer native bees.
- Managed bees, including bumble bees, honey bees and others, can have high levels of disease and transfer those diseases to native bees. Again, increasing their numbers can harm our wild bees, even if they are of the same species.

To get local fresh honey?

- Honey bees are the only bee in Canada that makes enough honey for us to harvest, so yes, if you want honey from your own backyard, you will need honey bees, as our native species won’t do it. But consider the impact the honey bees may have on the surrounding habitat (removal of food and disease transfer) and the work it takes to look after them. If you want fresh honey, it is often better to get some from a local experienced beekeeper than trying to look after them yourself.

To keep as pets?

- Bees are super cool to watch, especially the social ones. But again, they can be a lot of work and can have negative impacts on the environment, so be sure to think about the time and energy you have for them.

WHAT SPECIES ARE YOU CONSIDERING?

Avoid buying generic “bees”, e.g. “mason bees”. Order a specific species that could be found naturally in your area. We want to be careful to not introduce a new species to an area, as non-native species can often impact ecosystems negatively.

WHERE ARE THE MANAGED BEES FROM?

While it could be the same species as one found locally, did it come from a local source or from a different province/state or ecoregion? If it did not come from a local source, you could be introducing different genetics and/or diseases into your local population.

HOW WERE THE BEES COLLECTED/REARED?

Were they collected locally and sustainably?

- We hope that sellers are not over-harvesting their own local populations in order to sell the bees to other areas.

Were they reared in captivity? What precautions were taken to ensure healthy bees?

- Disease transfer is a real issue in captive conditions. Did the collector undertake procedures like disinfecting rearing areas and tools? Did they evaluate the nests/cocoons/bees for parasites and other diseases?

WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE WITH REARING/KEEPING BEES?

There is a lot of work required with keeping bees, particularly honey bees. It is not as easy as it looks! You need to register your honey bee hives and inspect them frequently (weekly) for diseases and other problems. Even solitary bee nests must be monitored.

