

# Maryland Pesticide Network



## News Release

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### **New tests find 51 percent of “bee-friendly” plants from major retailers across U.S. and Canada contain pesticides that can kill bees**

*Maryland beekeepers and environmental, health advocates say study confirms need to restrict neonicotinoids and for more information about pesticides usage*

**ANNAPOLIS, MD** – Many “bee-friendly” home garden plants sold at major retailers such as Home Depot, Lowe’s and Walmart, have been pre-treated with pesticides shown to harm and kill bees, according to a national [study](#) released today by Friends of the Earth and other organizations, including the Maryland Pesticide Network. Maryland beekeepers and public and environmental health advocates say the study confirms the need to restrict pesticides that can harm bees as well as the need for scientifically based professional pesticide usage reporting in the state.

The study, [Gardeners Beware 2014](#), shows that 36 out of 71 (51 percent) of garden plant samples purchased at top garden retailers in 18 cities in the United States and Canada – including plants in Cockeysville, Maryland, contain neonicotinoid (neonic) pesticides – a key contributor to recent bee declines. The neonic levels in some of the flowers were high enough to kill bees outright, assuming comparable concentrations are present in the flowers' pollen and nectar. In addition, 40 percent of the positive samples contained two or more neonics.

The testing is a larger follow-up to a first-of-its-kind pilot study released by Friends of the Earth last August. The new study expanded the number of samples and locations where plants were purchased and also assessed the distribution of neonic pesticides between flowers and the rest of the plant.

“Our data indicate that many plants sold in nurseries and garden stores across the U.S. and Canada are being pre-treated with systemic neonicotinoid insecticides, making them potentially toxic to pollinators,” said Timothy Brown, Ph.D., co-author of the report from the Pesticide Research Institute. “Unfortunately, these pesticides don’t break down quickly, so these flowers could be toxic to bees for years to come.”

“Last year, Maryland beekeepers lost nearly half of our hives. Honeybees are important pollinators, and any threats to bees threaten our entire food system,” said Roger Williams, a Maryland beekeeper. “Reducing the use of neonic pesticides would be a good step toward protecting our bee population.”

Bees and other pollinators, essential for the two-thirds of the food crops humans eat every day, are in decline in countries around the world. The European Union banned the three most widely used neonicotinoids, based on strong science indicating that neonics can kill bees outright and make them more vulnerable to pests, pathogens and other stressors.

A new meta-analysis of 800 peer-reviewed studies by the Task Force on Systemic Pesticides confirms neonics are a key factor in bee declines and are harming beneficial organisms essential to functional ecosystems and food production, including soil microbes, butterflies, earthworms, reptiles, and birds. The Task Force called for immediate regulatory action to restrict neonicotinoids.

“Maryland consumers often look for ‘bee-friendly’ plants, but this new research shows that neonic pesticides are contaminating those very plants, including here in Maryland, making them unsafe for bees,” said Ruth Berlin, executive director of the Maryland Pesticide Network.

“One of four ‘bee friendly’ plants purchased from a Cockeysville big box store had significant levels of at least three neonics,” Berlin said. “We call on retailers to follow the lead of Behnke Nurseries and Cavano's Perennials, who have stopped using neonics. Until then, gardeners should consider organic plants to protect bees.”

Neonicotinoid insecticides have been responsible for several high profile bee kills from high doses of the pesticides, but a strong and growing body of science shows that neonics contribute to impairment in reproduction, learning and memory, hive communications and immune response at doses far below those that cause bee kills. In this study, all of the nursery plant samples where neonics were detected have the potential to harm or even kill bees.

More than half a million Americans have signed petitions demanding that Lowe’s and Home Depot stop selling neonics. In the face of mounting evidence and growing consumer demand, nearly a dozen nurseries, landscaping companies and retailers, including BJ's Wholesale Club with more than 200 locations in 15 states, are taking steps to eliminate bee-harming pesticides from their garden plants and their stores.

Two Maryland nurseries, Behnke’s Nurseries in Beltsville and Cavano's Perennials in Kingsville, have stopped using neonics on their plants. Behnke's has also discontinued sales of all neonicotinoid-containing products.

In addition to pressuring retailers, advocates in Maryland supported a bill in the 2014 General Assembly session to restrict neonic pesticides usage to certified applicators only. The bill was withdrawn after it was opposed by the Maryland Department of Agriculture.

A coalition of Maryland citizens also continues to advocate for a scientifically valid pesticide reporting system, which would require professional pesticide applicators, including farmers and lawn care companies, to make their pesticide use information available to public health and environmental researchers. This information will help researchers determine if and when pesticides are affecting public health, waterways and wildlife – including honeybees.

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The Report *Gardeners Beware 2014: Bee-Toxic Pesticides Found in “Bee-Friendly” Plants Sold at Garden Centers in the U.S. and Canada*, tips for consumers and a complete list of the co-releasing organizations and cities where plant samples were gathered can be found at [www.BeeAction.org](http://www.BeeAction.org).

**Maryland Pesticide Network** is a grassroots coalition of organizations in Maryland dedicated to protecting the public and the environment from toxic pesticides and promoting healthy alternatives. Founded in 1994, MPN's diverse membership includes health care provider, consumer, environmental, parent, labor, agricultural and religious organizations. **Friends of the Earth – U.S.**, founded by David Brower in 1969, is the U.S. voice of the world's largest federation of grassroots environmental groups, with a presence in 74 countries. Friends of the Earth works to defend the environment and champion a more healthy and just world. [www.FoE.org](http://www.FoE.org).