



# The British Beekeepers' Association

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **PLOT G9: CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW A BEE GARDEN FOR TOWNIES Gardeners need bees and bees need gardens**

The first garden created for the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) at the Chelsea Flower Show shows how to create a productive and safe area for bees in an urban environment.

Without bees there would be very few flowering crops. Today 60% of our food plants depend on bees especially tree fruit, soft fruit, salad crops, beans and pears. No bees – no healthy diet.

The Garden for an Urban Beekeeper, designed by Philippa O'Brien, introduces a new initiative by the BBKA to actively promote urban beekeeping as so much bee forage has been lost in many areas of the countryside.

Already there are beehives hidden away on rooftops, behind garden walls and on allotment plots in the heart of most British cities and towns. They provide a vital service to local gardeners, collecting pollen and nectar from tree-lined streets, local parks and gardens and from railway embankments covered in ivy and bramble.

Philippa O'Brien, the garden's designer, said: "When kept properly, bees are good neighbours. It is however essential to select good tempered bees and to place the hive in a dry, sunny spot".

The BBKA bee-friendly roof garden at Chelsea is stocked with fruit, flowers and vegetables. As well as lavenders, scabious and wisteria there are fruit trees growing up a wall, currants and gooseberries that have been recently pollinated and summer vegetable crops that will require the services of the bees before they set fruit.

Central to the garden is the Beekeeper's Shed roofed with sedums to provide forage for the bees and stocked with clean protective clothing, hive equipment and honey. The position of the hives in the garden show how crucial it is for the bees to have a clear flight path out and into the hive. The two metre-high trellis demonstrates the importance of pushing bees above head height before they leave the garden.

Tim Lovett, Chairman of the British Beekeepers' Association, said: "The vital ecological role played by honey bees in our environment is immeasurable. Their economic contribution to UK agriculture and horticulture is £165 million a year at the farm gate".

"Keeping your bees healthy and productive requires knowledge and skill. At a time when bees can produce bumper harvests of honey, I would strongly encourage anyone wishing to take up beekeeping to take an introductory course and to get expert advice from their local association before they start.

“Many new urban beekeepers see working with a colony of honeybees as a healthy change to the stress of office life. Tending bees is peaceful, keeps you in touch with nature, and bees only sting when provoked.”

The BBKA garden would not be created without the support of Vann Plastic Ltd, Q Lawns Ltd, Stuart Garden Architecture, Fermi, Parterre, Carpel Manor College and Philippa O’Brien Garden Design.

The plan for a Garden for an Urban Beekeeper and a list of beekeeping associations can be downloaded from [www.britishbeekeepers.org.uk](http://www.britishbeekeepers.org.uk).

**ENDS**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The BBKA is a charity set up in 1874 by the gentry and the clergy to help poor cottagers. Today it supports and promotes bees and beekeeping and educates the public of the importance of bees in the environment. Membership through its 70 affiliated associations has increased by 25 per cent to over 11,000 in the last few years. Members benefit from public, product and bee disease insurance, a telephone helpline, local support and mentoring legal advice and an examination and assessment programme.

Representation and lobbying of government, European and statutory bodies is a key role for the BBKA. Members report any concerns about bee diseases to regional bee inspectors working for the National Bee Unit, a DEFRA funded organisation. It has dismissed reports that British bees are dying and that current mortality rates were not untypical for this time of year.

## **BEE FACTS AND FIGURES**

In the UK there are approximately 44,000 beekeepers looking after around 240,000 hives.

They produce 6000 tones of honey per year.

Each hive is worth about £400 to the agricultural economy.

We produce only 20% of the honey we consume - the rest is imported.

A hive can contain up to 70,000 bees in midsummer. There will be 1 queen, 250 drones, 20,000 female foragers, 30,000 female house-bees, 5,000 to 7,000 eggs, 7,000-11,000 larvae being fed, 16,000 to 24,000 larvae developing into adults in sealed cells.

The queen makes mating flight during her early life and stores the sperm from up to 20 drones that she collects on these flights. Drones that mate with her die in the act. She can store the sperm for up to 5 years.

To collect a pound of honey a bee might have to fly a distance equivalent to twice round the world. This is likely to involve more than 10,000 flower visits on perhaps 500 foraging trips.

A worker honeybee in summer lives only 6 to 8 weeks from the time she hatches as an adult bee. Before that, it takes just 3 weeks for her to develop from an egg.