

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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The Buzz about Bees

By Sophie Braccini

The fact that her grandfather was a beekeeper, a long time ago in her native Ukraine, may have something to do with Roxy Wolosenko's attraction to the *Apis mellifera* (the Western Honeybee); but it was not until she became a Master Gardener, and got more into plant life, that the Lamorinda resident took the leap. "The whole idea of the

connection between all living things became very real," she says, "bees are a part of the wild animal kingdom and we can interact with them. Having them around gives me the feel of being part of a cycle, of being part of the wilderness."

Not to mention the delicious honey she gets for her family every year.

Wolosenko has two hives in her garden. She transferred the colonies from her rural Bollinger Canyon home to suburban Lamorinda. "Bees give a better yield in our gardens because we grow flowers year round that feed them," she says. She is one of the many Lamorinda residents who have a few hives in their gardens. They get honey,

and their flowers, fruit trees and vegetables get pollinated; some feel part of the fight to keep the *Apis mellifera* healthy in California.

When the Shivelys moved to their new Lafayette home 12 years ago, they soon noticed a wild bee colony nestled in one of their oak trees. They enjoyed having them around and would have liked to capture a swarm, but they lacked the know-how. Then they found Steven Sparks, a biology professor at Ohlone College who cares for a plethora of hives – they now have three hives in their orchard. No one has ever been stung, the orchard has been producing like never before, and the Shivelys get a pound of wild honey each year for their own use.

"There are many experienced beekeepers around, and some of them may be willing to have 'new bees' help them in their hives," says Brian Wort, president of the Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association (MDBA) – the group which serves as the main source of information for individuals wanting to start caring for bees.

According to MDBA founding member Steve Gentry, there are about 25 Lamorinda families in the group. Gentry, an Orinda resident, sells his honey in farmers market (he was featured in the July 11, 2007, issue of Lamorinda Weekly), and is one of the group's instructors.

Wolosenko is also a member of MDBA. When she decided to start keeping bees six years ago she went to Craigslist and found Walnut Creek resident Mike Stephanos, who was giving out hives.

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The wild beehive at the Shively's.

Photo Sophie Braccini