

Bee Smart Sat

Heidi Heiland, chief experience officer (CEO) of Heidi's GrowHaus & Lifestyle Gardens in Corcoran, Minnesota, explains how their annual Bee Smart Sat promotes pollinators and native plants and highlights the property's regenerative and sustainable efforts.

By Teresa McPherson



WHAT DOES THE EVENT ENTAIL?

We hold a two-hour event on a Saturday in July, called Bee Smart Sat, that promotes a healthy landscape. The focus is on native bees, honey bees and pollinators in general. We include local industry partners who present their portion of expertise and we stage and merchandise with our native plants and present on that portion of the morning.

HOW DID THE EVENT COME ABOUT?

I have bee hives at my home and, when we opened up the GrowHaus in 2016, I installed bee hives there as well. We work with the University of Minnesota Bee Squad, who manages the hives for us in their Hive to Bottle program. Local and world-renowned Marla Spivak is a friend and she continues to inspire me. This helps promote the reality that not everyone should become a honey bee farmer, but everyone can garden. That is the answer — plant flowers! The Bee Squad harvests the honey for us from our hives and we sell our honey in the garden center. We always have some on hand to taste, sometimes drizzled over a nice blue cheese!



HOW DO YOU PUBLICIZE THE EVENT?

Sometimes we attract first time honey bee hobbyists, who want to learn more; other times, they are experts who are looking for more community. This then spun off into the local bee club holding an extracting class in our Potting Shed. We promote on our Facebook and Instagram pages, plus our enewsletter. We put it on our Sign Board, which is on the county road. We put up signs around our campus as well.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU DONE THE EVENT? HOW HAS IT CHANGED?

We have held this event for four years and have pretty much kept the same format. We hold it in what we call our "Potting Shed." There is an hour-long class component and then an hour-long hands-on portion.

Class Highlights

- Local expert and author Heather Holm presents on myriad topics and offers a book signing (we carry her books in our store).
- Another author, Rhonda Fleming Hayes, has also presented.
- Other years, we have had other local talent talk to us about bugs in general. Entomologist Jessica Miller has brought her bug and butterfly display boxes for kids and adults to admire and learn from.
- The Bee Squad usually has a portion of the class as well.

Hands-on Activities

- The hit of the morning is when everyone — adults and kids alike — wants to put on a bee suit. Erin Rupp, owner of Pollinate Minnesota, brings different sizes of suits and release waivers for all to sign. The hives are then opened up by the professionals on site. Our guests can hold a frame, taste honey straight from the comb and try to identify the queen. This hands-on class is fascinating and important to connect the dots. It also helps people who are afraid of bees go into that fear and come out the other side with new appreciation. We don't hold this event later into the summer than the end of July, as the bees don't want to be around people as much in August and after.
- Our garden center presents on the native plants that we carry and can be installed for a healthy landscape. We talk about how we grow in a regenerative and sustainable fashion on our 5 ½-acre campus. We don't use neonics, we make our own alive compost tea, and we capture and reuse water from the roof. 🍃