



SWEET ON HONEYBEES

“BEE DOCTOR” CHRIS HARP’S prescription for tending hives? “Organic beekeeping lets bees live their lives the way they’re supposed to, instead of manipulating them to produce more honey,” he says. Based in New Paltz, N.Y., Harp is cofounder of HoneybeeLives, an organization dedicated to strengthening the honeybee population by conducting workshops and fostering a network of like-minded beekeepers.

VT What should consumers know about purchasing honey?

Harp About 75 percent of the honey in the U.S. isn’t true honey according to the FDA. What’s technically classified as honey has a tracing source; honey can be traced back to where it came from by looking at the granules of pollen in it. Most of what’s on the market today is ultrafiltered, with the pollen removed, so all you have is the sugar content. Also, honey is naturally thick, but you’ve got these factories that want to fill bottles quickly. Heating honey to thin it kills the enzymes and the microbes that make it a healing product. It still tastes good, but there’s no longer the healing benefit. So buy local, and look for raw honey, which has never been heated.

VT If you don’t eat honey, why should you care about bees and beekeeping?

Harp Because every third forkful of the food you put into your mouth is the result of honeybee pollination. Without honeybees, we’d have no canola, no blueberries, no apples, no strawberries, no almonds. Our food supply would crash.

VT Colony collapse disorder is wreaking havoc on the honeybee population. What are we learning about CCD?

Harp Neonicotinoids have been linked to it; they’re a widely used pesticide. The manufacturer gets approval for their sale without coming up with the science to prove they are not harmful to honeybees. As of late there’s scientific evidence that neonicotinoids knock out the bees’ ability to navigate.

VT Any tips for avoiding bee stings?

Harp Honeybees will never come at you to sting you in the wild. If you’re at their hive and you have a fear of them, they smell the fear and want to get you away from the hive because you’re a threat—95 percent of how bees communicate is through scent. A honeybee will die when she stings you. So understand that the only reason she’ll sting you is you’re threatening the hive. 🍯