

BUYING BEE-SAFE PLANTS IN WEST METRO DENVER – 2024

What? How are plants not safe for bees? Sadly, it has become an industry-wide practice to preventatively treat nursery plants with systemic pesticides that persist in the plant and soil. A class of systemics called Neonicotinoids (or Neonics) are of particular concern to bees and have become ubiquitous in the industry. Research shows that these toxins can persist in plants from 18 months to 3 years, slowly adding to the toxic load of insects using their flowers for pollen and nectar.



People, this is tough. As we dig deeper into the practices of retail and wholesale nurseries, we are finding out that the chain of custody of plants from seed to start to grown-out plant is often murky with little way of tracing pesticide use along the way. We are saddened to report that the only answer for “Can I buy untreated plants at my favorite nursery?” is usually an emphatic “We don’t know!” However, there are a few committed retailers that we commend, and we recommend most nurseries that grow on site over those who don’t. We encourage all of you to continue to ask, ask, and ask again at your favorite nursery for more information, for more transparency about growing practices and plant sources...and we can keep chipping away at the might of the pesticide industry.

RETAILERS COMMITTED TO BEE-SAFE PLANTS!

You can shop at these places and feel great about your purchases. And give them a hearty thanks!

Harlequin Gardens

4795 N. 26th St, Boulder, CO 80301

www.harlequinsgardens.com

(303) 939-9403

100% pesticide and chemical-input free! What a great place to go buy plants - an adventure complete with chickens, ducks, and big views! They specialize in native perennials and have a selection of shrubs and trees and some herb and vegetable starts, but not a lot of annual flowers.

Finding Nectar Nursery

15550 Hwy 72, Arvada, CO 80007

www.findingnectar.com

(720) 667-7854

This newer nursery is dedicated to pollinator plants grown from seed with no neonics or other systemics. Brad is focusing mostly on Colorado and regional natives which make up over 50% of his current selection.

Sage Thymes

8550 W. Ohio Place, Lakewood CO 80226

www.sagethymes.com

(720) 480-1017

A small but well-stocked, pesticide-free seasonal nursery right in Lakewood! Chris opens a self-serve shop on her porch in April and sells a nice selection of herbs, vegetables, flowers and seeds through the summer.

High Plains Environmental Center

Loveland, CO

www.suborbitat.org

(970) 622-9676

HPEC is a non-profit that grows a wide variety of native plants that support pollinators. Their plants are 100% neonicotinoid free, and mostly native. They have a plant sale April thru September with rotating selections as the season goes on. Online ordering and pick up only. Additionally, they have open space trails, demonstration gardens, programs and events.

Resource Central – Garden In A Box

www.resourcecentral.org/gardens

“Gardens in a Box” are professionally designed, affordable, water-wise kit gardens. They go on sale in early March and sell out each year. (Order early!) All plants are neonic-free and gardens range from native to pollinator-attracting to vegetable combinations. Select a date and location for pick up in the metro area.

Desert Canyon Farm

www.desertcanyonfarm.wordpress.com

Canon City, CO

719-251-0651

This organic farm has “Open Farm Days” for the public each Spring. In 2024, they are open April 13 -June 19. Please check their website for hours, plant lists and other information. Extensive selection of over 2000 varieties of organic plants, including natives, perennials, fruit trees, herbs and vegetables for sale.

Farmers’ Markets and Plant Sales

Various

Many small farms will sell plants at Spring markets and rarely use systemics. The main thing to ask is if they grow from untreated/uncoated seeds and starts. Also, look for small plant sales and swaps where members grow plants or divide plants to share with each other.

Great Mail Order Options:

High Country Gardens (www.highcountrygardens.com) and Prairie Moon Nursery (www.prairiemoon.com) are both leaders in providing native plants that are neonic and systemic free! You will have to check that plants are native to our region.

RETAIL NURSERIES THAT GROW THEIR OWN PLANTS

These nurseries grow a significant portion of their inventory using primarily beneficial insects and natural products and have mostly local wholesalers as well. Shopping at these retailers gets you a step ahead of big-name brands, but we do not know where they source plant starts and if they are treated. ***And...you do have to ASK A MANAGER how to identify the plants grown in-house.*** Remember that asking about their plants and practices is an important way to let nurseries know we want bee-safe plants! Thanks!

Al’s Pine Nursery

6815 W. 44th Ave, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033

Find them on Facebook

Elliot Gardens

6321 Lowell Blvd, Denver CO 80221

www.elliottgardens.com

City Floral Greenhouse

1440 Kearney St, Denver, CO 80220

www.cityfloralgreenhouse.com

The Flower Bin

1805 Nelson Rd, Longmont CO 80501

www.theflowerbin.net

Duran’s Hobby Acres

15591 N 107th St, Longmont CO 80504

www.duransgreenhouse.com

Giambrocco & Sons Garden Center

14005 W. 64th Ave, Arvada, CO 80004

(303) 421-7228

Echter’s Garden Center

5150 Garrison St, Arvada, CO 80002

www.echters.com

Jared’s Nursery

10500 W. Bowles Ave, Littleton, CO 80127

www.jaredsgarden.com

Novacek's Greenhouse

2635 Youngfield St, Golden, CO 80401
www.novacekgreenhouse.com

Tagawa Gardens

7711 S. Parker Road, Centennial, CO 80016
www.tagawagardens.com

Southwest Gardens

4114 Harlan Street, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033
www.southwestgardensco.com

Young's Market & Garden Center

9400 W. 44th Ave, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033
www.youngmarketandgardencenter.com

RETAIL NURSERIES THAT DO NOT GROW THEIR OWN PLANTS

There are still many large and well-known nurseries that do not grow their own plants and source from both local and out-of-state wholesalers. **O'Toole's** is likely the most popular nursery here in Lakewood (additional locations in Westminster and Littleton), yet they do not grow any plants. We encourage you to talk to the manager of O'Toole's and other big nurseries (including, but not limited to...Front Range Gardens, Lafayette Florist & Greenhouse, Big Toolbox, Wilmore Nursery, Country Fair Garden Center, etc...) and say you would love to shop there if you could source plants that are not treated with systemics.

WHAT ABOUT OUR LOCAL WHOLESALE GROWERS?

Most local growers do not use neonicotinoids preventatively in their greenhouses, which is great! However, there are several issues that prevent us from calling them totally bee-safe growers.

- 1) Most growers have at least some percentage of their plants come in as starts from other countries or other wholesalers and they don't know (or ask) if they have been pre-treated. Some use coated seeds and it's not easy to find out what is in this proprietary coating. We hope it is not systemic pesticides but just don't know.
- 2) Most growers say they will use neonicotinoids if there is a major infestation in their greenhouse and we have no idea if they have done so at any time.
- 3) There are laws that govern plants traveling in and out of Colorado to prevent the spread of Japanese beetles and other major pests. Some big growers say larger pots could be treated with neonics to ship across state lines and we don't know if that means some treated pots will also be found in local retail nurseries.

Includes:

BOTANY LANE

BROWN'S GREENHOUSE

FORT COLLINS WHOLESALE NURSERY

GULLEY GREENHOUSE

HARDY BOY

KIYOTA GREENHOUSE

LITTLE VALLEY WHOLESALE

So are these local growers better? Probably yes! Plants coming into Colorado are more likely to be treated to cross state lines so buying plants from large national brands (think branded pots like Monrovia, Proven Winners, Easy Elegance) may mean pesticides....so we'd still bet on our local growers!

FRUSTRATED YET? SO ARE WE!

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

- 1) Buy organic plants and seeds whenever possible.
- 2) If you are not sure if a plant has been treated, plant it bare root! Gently knock the soil into the trash can (not compost) before planting. Neonics are often applied with a soil drench so keep those pesticides out of your nice soil!
- 3) Keep the blooms trimmed off a flowering plant the first season so that pollinators don't get the biggest dose of neonics. This technique has the added benefit of allowing the plant to focus on growing instead of blooming the first year, creating better roots and a nicer shape.
- 4) Up your seed-starting game! Many plants, including perennials and natives, can be directly sown in your garden which is by far the most affordable way to grow a garden. Read up on fall-sowing and cold-stratifying, especially for natives. There are many sources for organic and untreated seeds.
- 5) Invest in an indoor light set-up to grow more plants. You can add lights to most any shelving unit and create an attractive and effective little greenhouse. You have so many more options for interesting varieties this way.
- 6) Some good seed companies for untreated seeds include (but not limited to) local BBB Seeds and Botanical Interests, as well as Baker Creek, Johnny's, Seed Saver's Exchange, Seeds of Change, Territorial, High Mowing, etc. Prairie Moon Nursery for native plants. Or any organic seeds.
- 7) Swap plants with friends and neighbors that garden organically. Many plants need dividing after a few years or will reseed with new starts.
- 8) Consider planting more native plants which naturally support native pollinators and other native insects! Natives are more likely to be grown locally by small growers. They also need fewer inputs, such as water (once established), fertilizers and chemicals. And they naturally have fewer pests.

*****This list was compiled based on self-reporting of nurseries and growers. Find this list online at www.sustainableneighborhoodnetwork.org/beesafe***

For updates or questions, please e-mail kellimlin@gmail.com

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