



## Bee Friendly Spring Plantings - by Joe Lewis

Developing a garden to not only look good, but also to provide forage for your bees is a worthwhile effort. Finding the right mix of trees, shrubs, and flowers no doubt can be a lifelong pursuit. Nurturing a combination of plants that will result in at least one that is always in bloom is a definite goal. But there is no need to plant something that blooms in late May or early June. That is when our area already has plenty of good things for our bees. Instead focus on plants that bloom through the summer or even into the fall.

This month I would like to recommend a couple of plants to add to your “short term” action plan. These can produce results this year and should have an immediate positive impact on your bees. The first is Borage (*borago officinalis*) or “Starflower” which blooms in mid-summer and could continue to bloom until first frost. It has huge potential as a honey plant, but has received little attention in the recent past. In the classic book **Honey Plants of North America** (1926), Lovell gives it only a few lines, but admits it is “a great favorite with honeybees.... the honey has apparently an excellent flavor.” Originally native to the Mediterranean area this annual herb has many uses including as an addition to salad (where it is reported to have a cucumber-like taste). As a medicinal herb, the seed are often reduced to oil valued for its high content of gamma-linolenic acid (GLA). Most of the varieties seen have blue flowers but there are white varieties also. Seeds for planting are available from most on-line seed stores for under \$2 for 30 to 50 seeds, with prices discounted for higher quantities. Maybe we should go together as a group and buy some to share? If so, who would like to organize?



The second plant of interest is Lacy Phacelia (*phacelia tanacetifolia*). This plant is a super honey producer which in olden times was common on range lands in California but by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was seldom seen except where protected by underbrush. It is described by Lovell as a hairy, herbaceous plant. The plants produce flowers within about 6 weeks of planting and the bloom lasts for about 6 weeks. The honey is water white and nice tasting, but it granulates quickly. This honey plant is widely used in Europe, originally imported from the US. There are

hundreds of species of phacelia, but reportedly the two of most value are the *phacelia tanacetifolia* and the caterpillar *phacelia*. Seeds are a bit more expensive than those for Borage, but are also readily available.

For anyone interested, I have developed a list of over 100 useful, bee friendly plants and I will email it to anyone who wants to have it. Contact [lewisjoseph@verizon.net](mailto:lewisjoseph@verizon.net)