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Apitherapy Bee Gardens

Exploring a Paradigm for Bee-Centric Healing Centers

Priscilla Coe

This article was originally published in the December 2005 Journal of the American Apitherapy Society and is reprinted here with permission. It explores therapeutic centers where bees and apitherapy define everything from the landscape to the healing modalities offered. More than just a habitat, an apitherapy bee garden has an overt veneration for the honeybee and her generous healing gifts. Apitherapy refers to the use of bee venom therapy and products of the hive – primarily honey, pollen, royal jelly, and propolis – for healing.

In the fall of 2004, an email on the international Apitherapy-List (<apitherapy-list@apitherapy.com>) mentioned an apitherapy resort in Poland, Apiherba,¹ which is situated on several acres and offers stays in a restored palace. Dr. Kaluzny runs Apiherba and offers bee venom and apiphytotherapy treatments – that is, he utilizes remedies made from a combination of hive and botanical products. This article presents my own experience and inspirations as I've considered ele-

ments of an archetypal apitherapy bee garden.

The term “bee garden” has been used for centuries and indicates gardens that are planted with the intention of keeping bees. Current interest in habitat gardening provides plenty of information on what to plant to attract honeybees. A therapeutic bee garden, however, has more complexity and purpose, though as a starting point we can acknowledge that gardens are often inherently healing sanctuaries. Whether a retreat center, clinic, or simply a declaration that one's own backyard is now an apitherapy bee garden, the ambiance and healing modalities will, of course, be as varied as the people involved. Within this latitude of possibilities, the real common denominator is a special attitude toward bees that respects their unique role as healers and offers a willingness to provide an environment that is bee-centric.

I took up beekeeping several years ago, not for honey, but solely to give honeybees as natural a life as possible. I'd read about stresses on bees for years and beekeeping was a small

contribution for me to take on. The first project was to replant my biodynamic garden with bees in mind. With a professional background in food, I happily took on the task of plant selections, thinking in terms of “bee gastronomy.” Fortunately, I live in an area that is abundant with old fruit trees, citrus, eucalyptus, and where mustard and almond trees start booming in February. In hindsight, now that I am deeply interested in apitherapy, I realize this reverence for the honeybee coupled with intelligent planting form the foundation of a therapeutic bee garden. When I learned about Apiherba, I immediately declared my garden an apitherapy bee garden, adding new levels of veneration and learning to my relationship with my bees. For over a year, I have had bee venom treatments weekly, supplied bees to a local naturopath for treating others, and explored using hive products in numerous forms.

Apitherapy gardens must embrace the epitome of healthy gardening methods. If the soil is healthy, the plants are healthy and the bees are then foraging on the most nutritious nectar and pollen possible. This obviously impacts the quality of honey, the well-being of the hive, and surely impacts the integrity and potency of bee venom. Early on in my gardening, I asked a senior biodynamic farmer how he assessed the health of a farm or garden. He said he noted if the plants were relaxed yet erect, indicating strength; he sniffed to detect little puffs of fragrance that varied as he walked through the garden; and he knew that the quantity of buzzing and activity in the air were hallmarks of ecological health. Clearly, organic and biodynamic methods are the only choice for producing such vitality.

There are many resources online, particularly from universities, to help us in our selection of what to plant for bees, as well as books on the topic. Dr. Stefan Stangaciu of Romania has provided an excellent list of bee plants on <www.apitherapy.com>. Dr. Stangaciu is at the forefront of apitherapy internationally and is currently developing several acres as an apitherapy clinic which he refers to as a “bee paradise.”

In selecting plants, we need to strive for year-round nectar and pollen sources for bees as soil and climate permit. When there is enough acreage to segregate hives, crops may be planted to obtain specific honeys that treat specific diseases. In smaller gardens, diversity is the operative. My own preference is for heirlooms – bulbs, roses, vegetables, flowers, herbs, fruit trees – for their genetic integrity and because they are more interesting.²

What do bees like? Most modern hive management that is oriented toward commercial honey production gives us plenty of examples of what bees *don't* like. In a garden intended for apitherapy where bees are to be given utmost respect, some practices don't fit. A few examples include the use of plastic foundation and chemicals, and clipping the

wings of queens. How can we knowingly stress hives that are the source of our medicine? There is no better indication of what bees *do* like than the rhythmic, contented buzz of a happy hive whose needs are met. I consider this welcome sound a form of apitherapy.

How do we raise our consciousness about honeybees? Several writers invoke awe for the honeybee which can't help but impact apiary management. Maurice Maeterlinck,³ a Nobel Prize-winning literary figure of the turn of the twentieth century, wields tender observations with poetic images in his exquisite depiction of the hive. Images of “sacred chambers” of “royal nymphs asleep in their capsules” etch themselves in our souls. Rudolf Steiner,⁴ the Austrian scientist, philosopher and educator, writes about honeybees from a broad historical perspective and within a vast cosmological context. Steiner notes that the creation of six-sided honeycomb embodies the same formative architectural forces that created quartz crystals since earliest evolution. He speaks of honeybees as agents of formic acid processes in humans and the environment, an underpinning of all life which is little understood and largely overlooked.

As the caretakers of honeybees, we need to apply our intelligence and imagination to amplifying all that contributes to their health, which will ultimately contribute to our own health and the health of the environment. Steiner has written about the unique transactions that take place between the plants and honeybees which change the atmosphere in a garden where bees are active, something that is more palpable than visible. The Russian apitherapist, Naum Ioyrish,⁵ wrote that Professor N. Kholodny held the opinion that the “volatile organic substances discharged into the air by many plants are atmospheric vitamins.” In time, research may identify the qualitative difference our senses just begin to perceive in such a fully alive garden.

What is a vision for the future? Honeybees are under increasing stress. They have rewarded us consistently not only with their mysterious willingness to cooperate with us but, obviously, with their generous healing gifts. Just as we need the honeybees as our allies in health, they need us to establish sanctuaries for them from modern stressors. Over the coming years, apitherapy will become more necessary and more widespread in the United States and I like to think that therapeutic bee gardens and clinics will start to appear.

To arrive at what might be possible, we need to think big and think in terms of “bee utopias.” Decades ago, Ioyrish put forth his idea of utopian “beetowns” where senior citizens would live meaningful and healthy lives, daily tending hives and making medicines from hive products. My own vision of a bee utopia is of a center where people can retreat from today's technological buzz and restore themselves with

the biological buzz of bees. It would be completely ecological in design, extremely beautiful, nourish the senses with the arts, and have apitherapy and botanical medicine at its core. Imagining these bee utopias is a first step in creating therapeutic sanctuaries that can benefit us – and our dear honeybees.

Notes

- 1) Apiherba: <www.apiherba.pl>; <apiherba@apiherba.pl>; (065) 535-05 96
- 2) A few examples of heirloom sources include Old House Gardens for bulbs: <www.oldhousegardens.com>, (734)995-1486; antique roses from Heirloom Roses: <www.heirloomroses.com>, (800) 820-0465; old varieties of seed for edibles, flowers and medicinals from Seed Savers Exchange: <www.seedsavers.org>, (563)382-5990; Seeds of Change: <www.seedschange.com>, (888)762-7333; and Turtle Tree Seed, <www.turtletreeseed.com>, (518)329-3038.
- 3) Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Life of The Bee* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1901) (available from used book sources; full text is available online at <www.eldritchpress.org/mm/b.html>).
- 4) Rudolf Steiner, *Bees* (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 1998)
- 5) Naum Ioyrish, *Bees and People* (Moscow: MIR Publishers, 1974) (available from used book sources)

Resources:

American Apitherapy Society, <www.apitherapy.org>

Aston, David and Sally Bucknall. *Plants and Honey Bees: Their Relationships*. United Kingdom: Northern Bee Books, 2004.

Lovell, John H. *Honey Plants of North America*. Medina, OH: The A. I. Root Company, 1926.

Pellett, Frank C. *American Honey Plants*. Hamilton, IL: Dadant & Sons, 1976.

Wilder, Louise Beebe. *The Fragrant Garden*. New York: Dover Publications, 1974.

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Additional sources

Readers “interested in understanding the true nature of the honeybee. . . [and] who wish to heal the contemporary crisis of the beehive” are referred to Günther Hauk’s *Toward Saving the Honeybee*, available from the BDA for \$13.95 plus shipping, and Rudolf Steiner’s *Bees*, a series of lectures delivered in 1923 that “describe the unconscious wisdom contained in the beehive and its connection to our experience of health, culture and the cosmos.” Available for \$18.95 plus shipping.

Bird Flu: Failing to Learn the Lessons

Bernard Jarman

The first case of bird flu in a wild bird was recently discovered in Britain in a dead swan in Scotland. By continuing to support a policy of culling rather than vaccination, the British government has failed to learn the lessons from the last major animal health scare, foot and mouth disease, argues Bernard Jarman, executive director of the Biodynamic Agricultural Association (BDAA).

[Note: The role that wild birds play in the spread of avian influenza is a matter of some debate. It seems likely that its transmission throughout Asia is almost entirely due to human activity – the buying and selling of infected birds, virus spread on poultry workers’ clothing, etc. Wild birds were at first thought to have been the source of the disease in Europe and Africa, but there is a fair amount data that shows the disease transmission path has not always followed known migratory bird pathways. It has been suggested that wild birds found to

have contracted influenza, rather than spreading the disease, may have gotten sick through contact with local populations of domestic birds that have become ill through human activity.

There seems to be enormous similarity between the current bird flu scare and that of foot and mouth disease (FMD) five years ago. The UK government appears not to have learnt any lessons. Stamping out is the preferred UK position while Holland and France prefer vaccination. There is however one important difference to FMD. We are dealing with a disease that is coming via wild birds. This means that when it arrives, there will be no question of being able to stamp it out. It will be endemic in the UK. This needs to be recognized.

The BDAA is supporting a call by Elm Farm Research Centre for the government to stockpile vaccines in order to prevent the unnecessary mass slaughter of poultry that is