

Bee-killing pesticides found in “bee-friendly” plants from garden centers across Canada

(OTTAWA, ON, June 25, 2014) A new study released today by Friends of the Earth Canada shows that over half of “bee-friendly” home garden plants sold at garden centers have been pre-treated with neonicotinoid (neonics), pesticides shown to harm and kill bees.

The Canadian data is part of a larger study, [Gardeners Beware 2014](#), released by Friends of the Earth Canada and Friends of the Earth U.S. with Pesticide Research Institute (PRI). Garden plant samples were collected from top garden retailers from 18 cities across Canada and the United States. Canadian samples were collected in London (Ontario), Montreal (Quebec) and Vancouver (British Columbia).

[Gardeners Beware 2014](#) reported that 51 per cent of the total samples contain the bee-killing neonicotinoids. Some flowers contained neonic levels high enough to kill bees outright (assuming comparable concentrations are present in the flowers' pollen and nectar). Further, 40 per cent of the positive samples contained two or more neonicotinoids.

“The high percentage of contaminated plants and their neonicotinoid concentrations suggest that this is a widespread problem,” said Beatrice Olivastri, CEO, Friends of the Earth Canada. “Most gardeners have no idea their gardens may be harmful to bees. We’re circulating a [petition](#) calling on retailers to get neonicotinoids out of their plants and supply chain as soon as possible. Until then, gardeners should buy organic plants to ensure the safety of bees.” A majority of the UK’s largest garden retailers, including Homebase, B&Q and Wickes, have already voluntarily stopped selling garden products containing neonics.

In addition to pressuring retailers to stop the use of neonicotinoids in their supply chains, Friends of the Earth Canada is calling for Health Canada and Canada’s Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) to suspend the use of neonicotinoids in Canada as the European Union has in agricultural applications.

“PMRA is providing a loophole for retailers to avoid the cosmetic pesticide bans in provinces like Ontario,” observed Olivastri. “PMRA permits the use of neonicotinoids in horticulture including plants destined for garden centres as a ‘minor use’.”

High doses of neonics have been responsible for several high profile bee kill offs in Canada. However, even with doses far below the lethal dose of neonics, a strong and growing body of science shows that these pesticides contribute to impairment in bee reproduction, learning, memory, hive communications and immune response. In *Gardeners Beware 2014*, all garden plant samples where neonics were detected have the potential to harm or even kill bees.

“Our data indicate that many plants sold in nurseries and garden stores across Canada and the U.S. are being pre-treated with systemic neonicotinoid insecticides, making them potentially toxic to pollinators,” said Timothy Brown, Ph.D., co-author of the report. “Unfortunately, these pesticides don’t break down quickly so these flowers could be toxic to bees for years to come.”

“I want to thank our volunteer gardeners for donating their time and effort to collect the garden flower samples,” said Olivastri. “Without their help, Friends of the Earth Canada wouldn’t have been able to participate in the study.”

Gardeners Beware 2014 is a follow up to a first-of-its-kind pilot study, [Gardeners Beware 2013](#), released by Friends of the Earth U.S. last August. The new study includes more samples and sample purchase locations, as well as an assessment of neonicotinoid distribution between flowers and the rest of the plant.

For testing results for each province, please see the charts below.

The Report *Gardeners Beware 2014: Bee-Toxic Pesticides Found in “Bee-Friendly” Plants Sold at Garden Centers in the U.S. and Canada*, tips for consumers, the petition and a complete list of the co-releasing organizations and cities where plant samples were gathered can be found at www.BeeCauseCanada.org. Because of the late spring and sampling deadlines, Home Depot in Canada was the only “chain” retailer with flowering plants available and therefore sampled for Canadian sites in the study.

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For more information or to schedule interviews, contact:
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Friends of the Earth Canada is the Canadian member of Friends of the Earth International, the world's largest grassroots environmental network campaigning on today's most urgent environmental and social issues.

Pesticide Research Institute is an environmental consulting firm providing research, analysis, technical services and expert consulting on the chemistry and toxicology of pesticides. www.pesticideresearch.com.

