

# *The Xeric Gardener*

*by David Salman of High Country Gardens*

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## The Wonders of Neem and how it can Protect our Insect Pollinators

Neem Tree

Over the past two years, *High Country Gardens* has been calling attention to the plight of pollinators like the honeybee and native bees/bumblebees. Their populations are crashing principally as a result of mankind's chemically dependent agricultural practices, centralized food production, exotic pathogens and habitat destruction. Without robust populations of bees and other pollinators the world's food supplies are imperiled.

Gardeners the world over can make a huge difference in addressing this urgent problem right in our own back yards. By planting flowering plants that feed bees and other pollinators and eliminating the use of toxic chemical pesticides that kill or weaken bees we can help to rebuild bee friendly habitat and populations. Just imagine if the millions of acres of home landscapes in the US could become bee friendly; what a difference it would make!

I have just read a fascinating book on bees entitled "**The Incomparable Honey Bee and the Economics of Pollination**" by **Dr. Reese Halter**. This is a short but informative and fascinating book that is essential reading for all gardeners and anyone else concerned about the future of our food supply.

Below is an excerpt from a recent article by Dr. Halter about the

neem tree. I want to highlight his article because it tells us about bee-safe insecticides derived from this incredible tree. It is imperative that we stop using chemical pesticides on our home gardens and commercial farms. Their use has devastating effects on bees, butterflies, beneficial insects as well as the health of our environment and the purity of our.

It also calls our attention to the fact that there are many alternatives to our chemically dependent "business as usual" methods of agriculture if only we would open our eyes and minds to new ideas. Put people and nature ahead of corporate profits!

**"Back to Nature; having a need for neem"**

**by Dr. Reese Halter (used with permission) Source: Santa Monica Daily Press, June 16, 2009**

Of the more than 80,000 tree species on our planet, the Indian neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) is magnificent and known by millions of people as the village pharmacy. Imagine one kind of tree that offers medicine, cosmetics, rope, tea, glue, wood, fertilizer, pesticides and insecticides, lubricant, lighting and heating oil, veterinary medicine and shade. Welcome to the neem tree.

Neem is native to India and Burma. It grows from the southern Indian tip of Kerala to the Himalayan hills. It spans both tropical and subtropical latitudes, from wet tropical to semi arid regions and from sea level to 2,300 feet elevation. It does not tolerate cold temperatures or saturated soils.

These evergreen beauties can easily reach 100 feet in height with impressive regal crowns and 8 feet girths. They are very fast growing trees that are able to re-colonize denuded and infertile soils. Their profuse white mellifluous flowers bear fruit that at first glance resembles an olive.

Neem has been introduced to over 30 countries around the globe including the following states in the U.S; Arizona, California, Florida and Hawaii. Neem is particularly important in the developing world. It provides shade throughout the year and only in extreme droughts does it shed its leaves. Neem plantations provide employment and help generate income in rural communities.

Moreover, the developing world is utilizing the tremendous ability of neem to successfully combat encroaching desertification, deforestation and rising greenhouse gases.

For 3,000 years the Indian Ayurveda shamans have known of neem's potent insecticide, pesticide and medicinal properties. Extracts of neem are effective against at least 200 different insect species including locust, mosquitoes carrying malaria and voracious Australian blowflies.

Neem residue can be sprinkled on the soil, taken up by plant roots and used by crops as a plant defense mechanism, for up to 10 weeks, against insect infestations. There is no trace of neem residue in crops. Furthermore, pollinators like bees, moths and bats as well as beneficial insects such as spiders, ladybugs and dragonflies, nor any known warm-blooded animals or birds are harmed from neem extracts. Azatin, Align and Margosan-O are all neem-based products that protect crops.

Neem is truly one of Mother Nature's most remarkable trees.

(Dr. Reese Halter is a Los Angeles-based public speaker, conservation biologist and author of a newly published book, "The Incomparable Honey Bee and the Economics of Pollination," Rocky Mountain Books. He can be contacted through [www.DrReese.com](http://www.DrReese.com).)

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One Response to "The Wonders of Neem and how it can Protect our Insect Pollinators"

**Dr Reese Halter** says: February 9, 2010 at 11:07 pm

Thanks David! You Rock!!! Cheers, Dr Reese