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Honeybees are in a crisis. Since 2006, researchers at Penn State University have been noting the disappearance of honeybees, mainly due to Colony Collapse Disorder, believed to be caused by a virus. The loss of honeybees greatly affects crop pollination and food crop production. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, bee pollination is worth about \$15 billion to the food supply and produces one-third of the nation's diet.

A researcher at San Francisco State University is working on a nation-wide census of honeybees, and needs your help. The Great Sunflower Project currently has volunteers from every state, and is recruiting more. Volunteers receive a packet of sunflowers to plant in their yard, and commit to count honeybees visiting the flowers twice a month for 30 minutes. By documenting bee populations, researchers hope to find solutions to declining bee populations.

You can provide bee habitat in your own yard. By utilizing a technique known as xeriscaping, you can ensure you have a colorful, blooming garden, by planting native plants that attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds with their bright blooms. Xeriscaping is defined as "quality landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment," and uses water-efficient plants, such as native plants like native azalea or cosmos, which are drought tolerant, in landscaping areas. Combined with mulching and efficient irrigation, xeriscaping designs require less water, conserving the resource and lowering utility bills.

To be most effective, your xeriscape design should take into account climate and soil conditions. Consider the areas of your garden that are wet, very sunny, or shady, and plan plantings appropriately. You can obtain soil-sampling kits from your county

Cooperative Extension System office to test your soil for pH, nutrient levels, and other factors.

By choosing native, drought tolerant plants over species which are susceptible to disease, hard to establish, or need frequent attention, you will not only conserve water and reduce the use of fertilizers and pesticides, but also make your garden less labor-intensive. Mulch holds moisture in a garden, reducing the need for frequent irrigation.

Information about native plants and appropriate mulches, as well as other water conservation practices, can be obtained from your county Cooperative Extension System office. For more information about xeriscaping, check out *Water-Efficient Landscaping: Preventing Pollution & Using Resources Wisely* by the Environmental Protection Agency. This publication is available on the World Wide Web at: www.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/waterefficiency.pdf. To participate in the honeybee census, visit www.greatsunflower.org.