

## TREES FOR BEES CORNER

# WHAT TO PLANT FOR AUTUMN BEE NUTRITION



Angus McPherson and Linda Newstrom-Lloyd

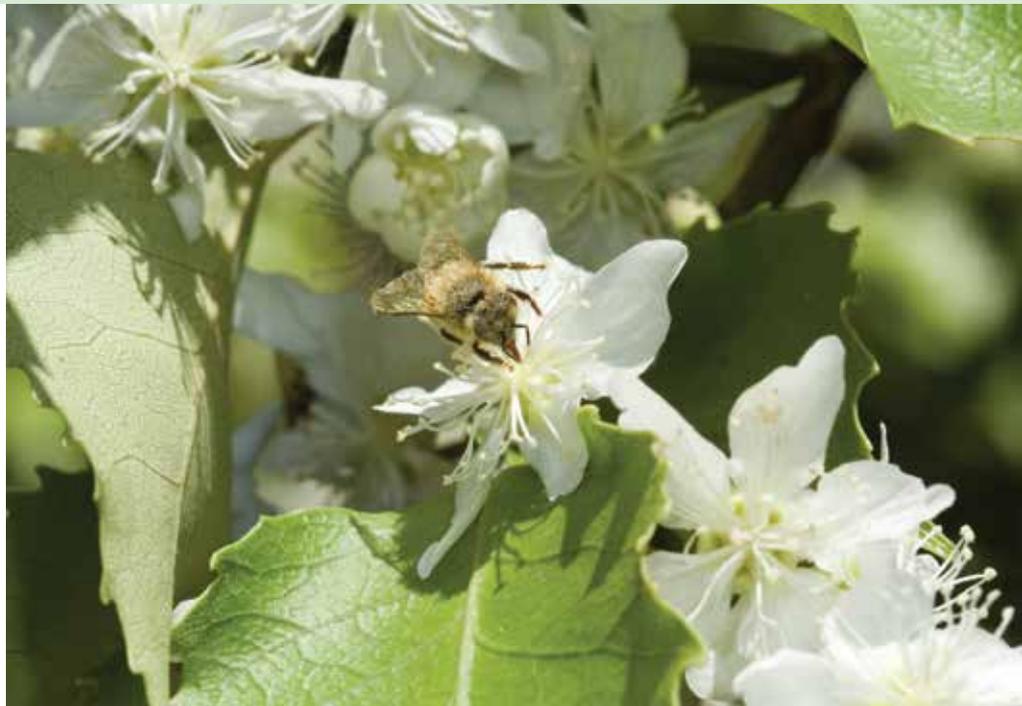
Autumn can seem like a difficult time for bee nutrition because so few plants are flowering. Most of them shut down for winter by early autumn. This is a time when bees need lots of nectar to store for winter—you just took most of their honey stores away of course, so they have to build back up.

We always see more bees taking nectar than pollen at this time of year. Yet this is also the time when the long-lived 'winter type' bees are being raised. This means that the colony also needs protein and lipids from pollen to make the new young bees strong enough to survive through the winter months. The best autumn-flowering plants are star performers because they provide abundant pollen with good protein, flower prolifically, and often secrete copious nectar too.

Among native plants, one of the best for pollen is lacebark, also called houhere or ribbonwood (*Hoheria sexstylosa* and *H. populnea*). These two species flower from January/March to May/June. Many Koromiko species flower in autumn and are used by bees for pollen and nectar. Examples are *Hebe salicifolia* and *H. stricta*.

Another important native is Golden akeake or Akiraho (*Olearia paniculata*), which flowers from March to June. Both Koromiko and Akiraho are small to medium shrubs, and can be planted as specimens in a garden or as hedging. Houhere grows to a medium-size tree, so needs to be planted where it has space to grow. One option is to combine all three species in a shelterbelt or apiary shelter, with Akiraho providing the windward shelter, Houhere as taller trees in the middle, and Koromiko on the leeward side.

Among exotic plants, some of the best pollen producers in autumn are in the Camellia group, which have huge 'superbowl' flowers with bountiful pollen in the centre. However, the highly ornamental varieties and cultivars are not suitable as the stamens have been bred out of the flowers. Species with less modified flowers, such as *Camellia sasanqua* and *C. transnokoensis*, have abundant large



Honey bee on Lacebark or Houhere (*Hoheria* sp.). Houhere is a native plant. Photo: Remco Baars.

stamens with lots of pollen. You need to check the flowers or consult the New Zealand Camellia Society to get the right cultivars. The related *Gordonia axillaris* and *G. yunnanensis* are full of bees foraging for pollen and nectar in the autumn.

An excellent autumn flowering tree is the famous *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* 'Rosea', which flowers from March to November. Banksias provide plentiful pollen and nectar in autumn; for instance, *Banksia integrifolia* flowers from May to July.

Finally, Laurustinus (*Viburnum tinus*), a common shrub everywhere, flowers in late autumn through early winter. Camellia, Gordonia and Viburnum species make great garden specimens, but they also hedge well and can be used in a flowering shelterbelt. Sasanqua

Camellias also espalier very well to form a feature wall or display. *E. leucoxylon* is not a large tree, but it does need some space to grow.

All of these plants can be purchased in a range of sizes (grades), with corresponding prices. Larger-grade plants (one metre or more in height) will most likely flower in their first season, whereas smaller-grade plants may take a couple of years or more. Depending on the number of plants required and how soon you wish them to be flowering, you can tailor your requirements to suit.

You can also supplement these trees and shrubs with autumn-flowering ground cover species, such as *Phacelia tanacetifolia* and *Salvia involucrata*. Check with your local nursery as to what will work in your region.