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Successful Beekeeping A-B-C's

By Terry Martyn Jr.

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About the Author

I will always be grateful to my grandfather who let me help him with his bee hives and about the productive and puzzling creatures inside them.

I wrote this book to answer your questions and encourage you, like many other people I've talked to, to become new bee keepers.

I've tried to cover as many aspects as I could without loading you down too much with theory or opinion.

I also hope that that you will use it as a reference and for motivation from when you first set up a hive to the time, not too far away, when you start sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with other would-be apiarists.

Then, you might agree with me that the benefits are much more than just honey and money!

Terry Martyn Jr.

Benefits of Beekeeping

Pollination

Pollination: Bees are active pollinators. Most plants require effective pollination for their survival. Bees are the most preferred pollinating insects. Extensive and proper pollination can bring about larger harvests of fruits, vegetables, and crops. Having bees nearby can bring a marked improvement in the quality and quantity of vegetables, fruits, or flowers you and your neighbors grow.



Research shows that the dollar value of pollination by domesticated bees and beekeepers to a range of agricultural crops in the U.S.A. alone is measured in the millions of dollars per year.

Stress Reliever

Although there may not be any specific scientific claims to prove it, yet, beekeepers feel bees help them reduce their personal stress levels. Visitors enjoy just watching the bees coming in and going out of their hives with all their hustle and bustle.

Educational

Beekeeping is very educational for adults and children. You can learn many things from watching bees as they follow specific patterns of work.

Different categories of bees have assigned duties. Keeping a regular watch on beehives, observing bees, drones, and worker bees going about their work can teach us valuable lessons on work and time management.

Gifts

Beekeeping helps you to be able to shower your friends and relatives with various exclusive gifts at a fairly low cost. Gift items from your beehives could include bottled honey, beeswax, cosmetics, homemade candles and even lip balm.



Healthy Products

You can use the bee products available from your bee colonies to

maintain your health. A regular supply of fresh, pure honey collected from your own beehive is just the start.

Many people believe that propolis (a glue produced and used by bees to maintain their combs) is good for you.

First Steps

Before you order or build your first hive and invite any bees to move in, check that you have the space, time, money and other resources necessary for your new hobby.

I will share the knowledge I've gathered about every aspect of beekeeping but much will depend on your personal circumstances and other commitments, local regulations and your neighbors.

Cost

You need enough money to set up your hives, gather the equipment needed and buy your bees long before you will see any return at all from the first couple of hives.

You can sometimes get used equipment at a lower cost but you must be careful that every precaution has been taken to ensure that it does not carry any defects or residue of any disease which could affect your bees.

The best advice is to buy new equipment and to pay a bit extra for better quality gear that you can be confident will require minimum maintenance and last longer.

You need to work out for yourself what it is worth to you to reduce the time and stress that can result from buying out of the bargain bin, especially when you are still learning your way around.

Space

You need enough space to locate each hive with at least a few feet clear of obstructions. You should allow at least three feet between hives.

You also need easy access to the area where you put your hives. You will need to remove, repair or replace parts of the hive, bring in your equipment and take out the honey and other produce as well as damaged hive sections.

Keep some distance between the hives and any public paths or roads. This reduces the chance of bees upsetting passers-by or the public interfering with your bees.

Planting a hedge or placing some fencing about 6 feet high between the hives and any public area will reduce the possibility of conflict. It's no problem for the bees which are naturally inclined to circle upward as they leave the hive so that they can map their surroundings for the return journey when they will, usually, be carrying a valuable load.

Food, Water etc.

Bees can travel miles to get the food they need but the shorter the distance they need to cover, the less risk that they do not return and the greater chance of a bumper harvest from happier, stronger bees.

A reliable, year-round source of water is also essential. It should not be something like a pool or a bucket under a dribbling tap which the bees would have to share with other creatures, human or animal.

The water should be at least a few feet from the hive so that the bees can relieve themselves on the way. Bees do not foul their hives and you don't want them fouling their water supply.

Make sure that there is something, like twigs or small pieces of plastic foam, floating in the water where they can stand while they drink. Bees don't swim – they can drown!

Pets and Other Domestic Creatures

My cat has never had a problem with my bees and most cats will probably be too smart to get stung.

Dogs, generally, are more inquisitive, even aggressive and there is probably more risk of a painful confrontation. Keep the dog away from the area where the bees are travelling and drinking or make sure it is closely supervised by an adult or responsible older child.

Larger animals, like cattle and horses, are more likely to harm your bees and the hive than suffer any major damage themselves. Don't risk it!

Wild Animals

From bugs to mice and on up to bears, they're all likely to have a negative effect on your bees and your returns. Keep them away by whatever legal means you can.

Avoid poison, if for no other reason than it could hurt you, your honey and your bees as well.

Climate

Bees can live almost anywhere where there is enough vegetation to provide the raw materials for their comb building and honey production.

But, you should avoid intense sunlight or dark areas where they would have to work too hard to moderate the temperature inside the hive.



Under a shady tree might be a good location but keep a reasonable distance from the tree trunk and branches.

If your area gets frost or snow, you will need to protect the hives during the cold months. You might wrap the hives while leaving the entrance area clear.

You will also have to ensure that there is no snow or condensation inside the top of the hive. As the frost melts, the cold water could drop on and kill your bees. That could have a serious effect on the health and productivity of the hives.

Don't put the entrance in the path of the prevailing wind.

Hilltops and the bottom of depressions expose your hives to cold weather and the risk of damp seriously affecting the internal parts of the hive and, of course, the health of the whole colony.

If the hive receives sunlight early in the morning, that encourages the bees to start their work sooner.

Rules and Regulations

Before you start beekeeping, you must check all county or district restrictions. Some counties require beekeepers to register apiary locations with the county agricultural commissioner during January or whenever you get new bees.

You need to pay appropriate fees.

Neighbors

You should also consider any possible allergic reactions to your family or neighbors due to beekeeping. Consider possible oppositions before you start beekeeping.

Much of the opposition which I've heard about has been fuelled by media reports of "killer bees" which are mostly hype.

But, there are a small number of people who can have a serious reaction to even one bee sting.

The other downside of bees is their droppings can damage a car's exterior and, of course, put spots on the vehicle. This is not usually a major factor – birds drop more mess and nobody bans them.

You can also reduce the possibility by putting fencing or tall plants, about six feet high, a few feet in front of the hive entrance to encourage the foragers to fly higher soon after leaving the hive and to stay high on their return flights.

Watch and Learn from the Bees

The most important lessons that you will learn will come from your bees. So, be prepared to spend a reasonable amount of time in their company.



An important factor in your eventual success is the gradual development of your understanding or intuition about how your particular bees are doing.

We must use all our senses when we are near the hives. Sometimes, it might just be an out of the ordinary smell or sound which is the signal that something is

wrong and we need to take some sort of action.

For instance, your bees may be rushing around the hive entrance. This is common when the foragers are starting out in the morning or when a bee has returned to the hive and alerted the other workers of a new, rich source of food for the colony.

But, the current commotion may be the result of an attempted invasion by aggressive bees from another hive!

You can see how important it is that you learn as quickly as possible how to know what event you are watching and what action, if any, you need to take.

Join Your Local Beekeeping Group

Membership of your local group of beekeepers can also be invaluable.

One of the greatest assets for a new beekeeper is the knowledge and active support of more experienced people in your area.

However, it is a common complaint that, "When you get three beekeepers together, you are sure to hear at least four theories of the best way to keep bees!"

The first lesson is that we should never stop listening and learning.

You will only know how good the advice you are given is when you put some of it into practice. Beekeeping, after all, is a hobby with more than 1000 years of history behind it. We still have a great deal to learn and it is even possible that we have forgotten some important points about proper hive management.

Some say that our hobby is as much an art as a science.

If we stop listening, learning and evaluating ideas and practices that are new to us, we reduce the potential benefits that we may gain from our beekeeping.

Just because an idea is new or has been successful for another beekeeper, does not mean that you should blindly follow these suggestions and rush to change your current method, especially if it has been successful for you up until now!

Your own ideas will change to some extent as you get more experience around your hives.

The more experienced members can not only provide information which will speed your learning process, some may let you watch them do the various tasks, like inspecting hives and frames, preparing and using a smoker etc.

You could also help the other members by volunteering to help them with some of the physical work and gain some valuable experience for yourself.

Many clubs offer classes where you can learn some of the practical aspects of your new hobby. Don't be afraid to ask questions about any part which is not clear to you.

From my own experience, I know that many people hold back because they don't want to exhibit their lack of knowledge in front of the other people. But, this can seriously delay your development as a successful beekeeper.



You may also be helping other inexperienced people who are also having trouble with that particular aspect but hesitate about asking questions.

In fact, it's a good idea to seek out other beginners in the group and have your own discussions and provide support to each other when needed.

Don't worry if some of the group seem to progress much faster than you feel you are doing. The important thing is to learn the basics thoroughly, but do it at a pace which you personally are comfortable with.

Support the Group

Try to give back something for the value you get, not just by paying your annual subscription and turning up for meetings. Every club of whatever kind needs more members who will invest some of their time and energy to help the club with the smooth running of projects and the regular meetings.

Almost every club, not just beekeepers, usually has too many drones.

Many members will notice your willingness to give back. Some may try to take advantage but it will also encourage more members to share their experience with you.

Types of Bees



There are many varieties of bees.

The most common domesticated bee is the ***Apis mellifera***.

I suggest you start with the "Italian" species which has earned a reputation for their usually peaceful attitude, production and general good health.

Discuss this with other keepers in your local area before making a decision. There may be reasons based on local conditions which have the majority selecting another species. But, make sure this is not something which only one particular beekeeper is fixed upon.

Queens, Workers and Drones.

All bee colonies have three categories of bees; the queen bee, female worker bees and male drones.

Queen Bee

A single egg is laid in a single cell of a wax honeycomb. Worker bees produce royal jelly to feed larvae. All larvae are fed royal jelly initially. Later, a single larva is fed only royal jelly while others are fed pollen and honey. This single larva undergoes several moltings and then spins a cocoon within the cell before pupating.

This larva grows into the queen bee.

The Queen bee is the largest bee and the only breeding female in the colony.

The Queen bee is raised from a normal egg but, after selection to be the new queen, the workers continue to feed her Royal Jelly instead of the pollen the other immature bees get.

She has a longer body than the others but has short wings. She may be lighter or darker than other bees in the colony. Since she cannot take care of herself, she has many attendant bees to feed her, follow her, groom her, and carry away her waste. The queen bee has an unbarbed stinger. She rarely stings beekeepers. Her sting is used for stinging other queens. She can sting any number of times.

Normally, there is only a single mated adult queen within a hive. Sometimes, there could be a mother and daughter queen within a single hive.

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