

AN INTRODUCTION TO

BACKYARD BEEKEEPING

1ST EDITION | 2020

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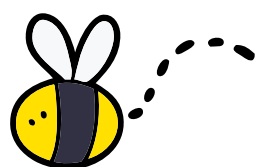




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A FINAL WORD





So you've decided to venture into beekeeping and perhaps you're wondering where best you can set up your beehives. Well, look no further than your backyard. Backyard beekeeping doesn't require a lot of space, and if you have plants around, then that's a suitable environment for the bees to thrive in.



Provided you have checked with your local authorities and you have met all the legal requirements of beekeeping in your area, you will be ready to go. Make the necessary concessions with your neighbors to avoid any possible disagreements with them about your beekeeping activity.

Ensure that your backyard is a place that gets enough sunlight, because bees need sunlight to survive and work better. Your backyard should also be free from any pests and possible bee predators that may feed on or chase away the colony.



WHY BACKYARD BEEKEEPING

Backyard beekeeping is great for those aiming to keep bees for conservation or beehive products purposes. With backyard beekeeping, you are able to engage with ease and enjoy the benefits of beekeeping.

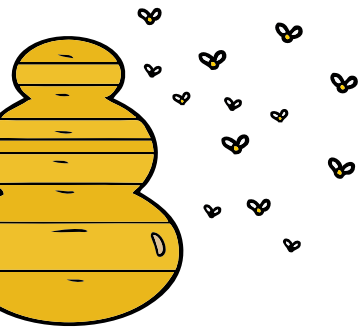
The beehives are close to you, so hive inspections and management are easy to plan and carry out. With apiaries that are located far from you, the free time you get may not be enough for a hive visit.

It results in delayed hive inspections at a frequency that is not regular enough. With the bees in your backyard, you can access them with the right frequency and at the best time of the day.

With the space constraints experienced by many prospective beekeepers, backyard beekeeping is a great solution. Land is not cheap, and many people who would want to be beekeepers cannot afford large tracts of rural land on which bees were traditionally kept.

Backyard beekeeping allows you to use the little space you can spare on your land to engage in beekeeping. It enables you to do what you enjoy doing and contribute to pollination while at it.

Of course, you also get to enjoy the supply of honey and other beehive products you periodically harvest from the beehives in your backyard beekeeping operation.



KNOW YOUR BEES

Before getting yourself into beekeeping, it is important to acquaint yourself with some basic knowledge about bees, as this will make the venture much easier for you.

We encourage you to join a beekeeping club in your area (if there is one), in order to learn as much as possible about bees. It won't cost you much to join a local beekeeping club, and it's very beneficial to learn firsthand even more information about bees and how they are dealt with. Beekeeping clubs are usually full of people who have been in the practice for a long time, and so you will definitely learn a lot from them.

Reading beekeeping books is also important in getting to know more about bees. Before going into backyard beekeeping, buy a few beekeeping books to learn about bees and beekeeping. Three books are usually adequate for a start. You should go for one beginner's book, and two advanced beekeeping books. The more you read about bees, the better you will be in your backyard beekeeping. When you join a beekeeping club or association, you may try borrowing beekeeping books from the members in the club. You should also be ready to share your books with the members so they too can benefit from you.

Our website too – **BeeKeepClub** is be a useful resource for learning about bees and beekeeping. You can also learn how to make some of the equipment you need in beekeeping from guides found on on our website. Use forums and websites with credible information so that you do not make costly mistakes in your beekeeping operation.





IMPORTANT STEPS TO FOLLOW AS YOU START **BACKYARD BEEKEEPING**

Have Enough Capital for Investment

For your start of backyard beekeeping, make sure to have enough capital. Beekeeping is an investment that requires you to spend money on various items and activities. You should plan beforehand and set aside enough capital to keep the going until it is self-sustaining. The total capital you need varies on how many beehives you intend to start with. Even then, not having all the capital you need at the beginning of your should not stop you from starting. You can put in place a plan for the sourcing of capital over time so that you buy what you need over a period of time.

The most important equipment and supplies needed for the start of beekeeping should take priority in using up the available capital. Later, you will source for more capital and use it to acquire the equipment and supplies needed in later stages of beekeeping. The capital you have is best used up following a business plan that you draw up before starting backyard beekeeping. It prevents misuse of the capital and helps you track expenditure.

Fencing the area in your Backyard

It will be important that you fence the area before you even purchase the beehive and the bees. Fence made out of wood that is about eight feet tall is advised to avoid the possibility of bees flying low and stinging people. The fence also keeps out predators of honey bees that might attack beehives and cause destruction. The sturdy fence should be capable of keeping out the largest predators in your area such as bears. It forms a first line of defense for your honey bee colonies and the beehives which are very important investments in your backyard beekeeping operation.



Using a live fence is recommended if you can have one. It should be high and thick enough to serve its functions well. If you do not have one already, you can plant it alongside the other barrier or fence you are using. Once the planted live fence is thick and high enough, you may remove the non-green barrier you were using.



The live fence acts as a barrier between bees and traffic, as well as making bees gentler. Movement of the live fence in wind makes bees accustomed to movement near the beehive. They are less likely to sting you when you are working the bees. If the fence is made of flowering plants, it becomes a small source of nectar and pollen for the bees in your backyard apiary.

When buying Bees, buy those that are Gentle

Bee breeds are different in nature – there are those that are aggressive, and there those that are gentle. The major types of bees are European bees, Italian bees, Russian bees, Carniolan bees and African bees. Other breeds are present and kept by various beekeepers round the world. They have different temperaments, resistance to diseases and parasites, and foraging capabilities. As you are just starting off with backyard beekeeping, it is advised that you buy the gentle bees. Gentle bees make it easier for you to carry out hive inspections too. It would be very discouraging and a steep learning curve for a beginner beekeeper dealing with aggressive bees. If you buy very wild and hostile bees it could also turn out to be a recipe for problems between you and your neighbors and possibly even law enforcement.



Ask around in your beekeeping club to find out the beekeeper with the gentlest bees if you buy your bees from a local beekeeper.

It is advisable because the local bees are well adapted to the climatic conditions of the area. [Click here to find out where you can buy bees.](#)



It is Better to Start off with Two Colonies on Different Hives

This is usually advised because you can never be sure if your honey bee colony will survive, and so if you got two colonies in case one does not make it you will still have another one. Another advantage of having two hives is that you can use one to strengthen the other if it is failing. A few brood frames added to the failing hive helps with quickly raising the number of bees present in the honeybee colony.



Beginner beekeepers going into backyard beekeeping benefit from having more than one hive, by having the opportunity to compare the progress of the honey bee colonies.

Sometimes, you are not too sure of how each colony is performing and the impact of your hive management practices on the honeybee colonies.

With two hives, you can compare progress of the colonies with ease and identify the best management practices for your honeybee colonies.

You may want to go for more than two beehives in your backyard beekeeping. While that is good, and possible, it is advisable that you cap yourself at three beehives. As a beginner, having more than three beehives may turn out to be too much for you. You may easily end up losing one or more of the hives due to your lack of experience.

Invest in a Beekeeping Starter Kit

A beekeeping starter kit has everything you need to get started in beekeeping, except the bees. It's a great package deal for beginners. The beekeeping starter kit should include all what you need to start beekeeping or nearly all of it. There are many manufacturers and seller of beekeeping starter kits with different pricing.

The items they include in the kit vary in number and quality, so you should do some researching before settling on one. Have a list of items to look out for so you are sure they are included in the beekeeping starter kit you buy. Those that are not in the kit can then be bought individually later on.





The important components that should be included in the beekeeping starter kit are: beehive boxes, smoker, entrance reducer, queen excluder, beehive frames, bee brush and a hive tool. Some include a beekeeping suit and accessories for the bee smoker.

Buy Protective Clothing

As a beginner, you should buy protective clothing that you will use during inspection of your bees, so as to prevent the bees from stinging you. The protective clothing should fit you well so that it is not cumbersome working while wearing it.



Include beekeeping gloves of various types in the protective clothing. Goatskin gloves are great for sting protection. As you get more experienced and comfortable being around your honeybee colonies, you can try nitrile gloves that give better dexterity.

Alongside the beekeeping suit and veil, you should also consider foot protection. Sufficiently thick socks and boots are your best protection from stings to the feet.

There is minimalist beekeeper protective clothing available in the market. Beekeeping smocks and jackets do away with the lower body protection in exchange for increased comfort and less weight. They are not advisable for beginner beekeepers going into backyard beekeeping. You may try them out later in your beekeeping journey after you have gained more experience and are confident being around honeybees.

Inspect the Beehives on Regular Basis

To ensure that your investment and work is not in vain, you are advised to conduct routine inspection of the beehives at least two to three times weekly. Honey bee colonies are usually very delicate, especially when the colony is just starting to build up. Check on them to confirm that they have enough food and water supplies.



Regular hive inspections are also useful for identification of problems such as burr comb that need to be dealt with. Comb built in the wrong places in the beehive can be very problematic for you. It impedes your hive maintenance activities and can result in losses later on.

Noticing burr comb early on allows you to take remedial measures to remove the comb and address the cause of it. You should also check for honey bee diseases, pests and parasites during hive inspections. Left unchecked, these honey bee problems cause heavy losses in your backyard beekeeping operation. Early identification allows for control measures to be taken.



You will know if the queen bee of your honeybee colony is present in the hive and laying eggs during hive inspections.

The presence of eggs in brood comb is usually enough to inform you that the colony has a laying queen. You might also be able to see and visually identify the queen bee.

Marking her often helps with quick identification of the queen bee from among the thousands of bees in the hive. A honeybee colony without a queen bee or with one that is not laying eggs gets weak and may die off.

For effective hive inspections, it is best to have a hive inspection checklist to use in your first year or so of backyard beekeeping. The checklist guides and reminds you of what to look out for and what to do in every hive visit.

Alongside the checklist could be a small guide on the identification of common hive problems such as diseases, pests and parasites. You could also have with you a guide on how to carry out some of the maintenance activities you need to do in a hive inspection.

Experienced beekeepers that have done many hive inspections can leave the checklist behind and make no mistake or miss anything during a hive inspection.



BENEFITS OF BACKYARD BEEKEEPING

Use of Available Space

The space required for backyard beekeeping is not much. You can have a backyard apiary of several hives when you do not have large pieces of land on which to keep bees. This allows any person who wants to keep bees to be able to do so.

Additionally, backyard beekeeping is good use of space that would otherwise be unutilized or used in a way that does not earn any income for you. Backyard beekeeping is also great way for beginner beekeepers to get into beekeeping. It can act as a starter beekeeping operation for you to get hands-on beekeeping skills.

Ease of Honeybee Operation Management

In a backyard beekeeping operation, you have great access to the honeybee colonies. They are not far off and you eliminate transportation costs that would use up some of the capital you have for beekeeping. With backyard beekeeping, the beekeeper can use any free time they get to carry out hive inspections and hive management activities.

Contribute to Bee Conservation

There is increased need and awareness about bee conservation. Keeping backyard bees contributes to the continued presence of bees in the ecosystem. Honeybees are great pollinators of plants including food crops. By becoming a backyard beekeeper, you help nearby farmers while earning from the beekeeping effort.



Produce your own Beehive Products for Use

Many people who want honey for their consumption often find it too expensive to buy. A backyard beekeeping operation gives you honey at lower costs. You are also sure of the quality of honey since you manage the production process.

Honey that is bought might at times contain additives and be adulterated by unscrupulous sellers. While most beekeepers are honest and only sell the best quality honey, an encounter with low quality honey is not interesting and can be avoided by keeping your own bees. Other beehive products that you might need such as beeswax are also easy to produce from your own backyard beekeeping operation.

Source of Income

You earn income from your backyard beekeeping from sale of excess beehive products or those that you do not consume. Many people may not have a lot of use for beeswax and other hive products such as propolis and pollen. You can still harvest these beehive products and sell them off for the extra income.

Beekeepers with the time and investment to spare can add value to these beehive products before selling them so that they fetch better prices in the market. An example of such value addition is the making of candles from beeswax before packaging them and selling them.

A Great Family Activity

You can get your spouse and children interested in beekeeping with ease. It is a fulfilling activity that can be done as a common hobby. By teaching your children beekeeping, you impart to them a skill they can use later on in life to earn an income.

Additional skills learned in beekeeping are also useful such as management of resources and marketing. The skills imparted vary depending on the level of involvement you allow the children to have in the beekeeping operation. It is therefore best to involve them in the entire backyard beekeeping operation when their age allows you to.



CHALLENGES TO BACKYARD BEEKEEPING

Backyard beekeeping faces some challenges. It is important that you acknowledge these challenges and find ways of getting around them. The common challenges encountered by backyard beekeepers include:



Unfriendly Neighbors

The people with homes next to yours may not welcome the idea of having bees in the neighborhood. They are afraid of being stung themselves or the animals they keep. In neighborhoods with zoning or development laws, you might encounter resistance to keeping backyard bees. You therefore have to be very diplomatic about starting backyard beekeeping.

Making sure you have taken measures to prevent interaction between your bees and people is a great step towards getting acceptance of your backyard beekeeping operation. You can also share some of the beehive products you harvest from your backyard beehives with your neighbors periodically.



Local Laws

Zoning, development and agricultural regulation laws can become an impediment to backyard beekeeping. Different states and counties have in place laws regulating how agriculture (including beekeeping) is to be done.

In some places, you might find that the laws do not allow backyard beekeeping, while in others you are free to carry out the activity. It is important to find out all laws that you need to abide by before going into backyard beekeeping. It saves you from a clash with the authorities and the crushing of your beekeeping dream.

When you are targeting markets outside your immediate area with the products from your backyard beekeeping operation, you should also make sure to abide by any laws in the market that may impact on how you carry out backyard beekeeping.

Predators, Pests and Diseases

Beekeeping has seen a surge of honey bee pests and diseases in recent years. You might have to deal with a threat to your beekeeping operation more than once in your backyard beekeeping. The effect of predators, pests and diseases is felt in the beekeeping operation from lost or damaged beekeeping equipment and weakened or dead honeybee colonies.

During the setup of your beekeeping operation, make sure to have perimeter fencing that can keep out the large predators of honey bees. You should also put in place measures to protect your beehives from attacks by smaller predators of honey bees including flying insects such as yellow jacket hornets.



Constant vigilance and readiness is the best way to deal with diseases and pests of honey bees. Detecting a pest invasion or disease infection of the honey bee colony early in its onset, enables you to deal with the problem before it causes you great losses.

Ultimately, it allows you to help the honey bee colony surviving and producing the beehive products you desire at optimum levels. The quality of beehive products you harvest from a honey bee colony with no pests and diseases is high and fetches you the best prices when selling.

Parasites

Honey bees have parasites that attack them and lower their productivity. Out of many such parasites, thoracic and Varroa mites are the most injurious to the well-being of the honeybee colony. They spread diseases in the colony and even between colonies while making the honey bees unable to feed well or be productive. Varroa mites also lead to deformities in honey bees that make the hive weak over time.



There are different ways of controlling these parasites of bees. Some of the control methods make use of chemical applications while others do not. You should choose two or more methods of controlling parasites of honey bees in your beekeeping operation and be ready to use them with short notice. The application of chemical treatments in honey bees carries with it the risk of contaminating hive products, so use it with caution. The parasites might also develop resistance to the chemical treatment when it is overused or applied incorrectly. At the same time, it is important to note that you should not leave parasite infestations unaddressed. The parasites can sometimes multiply in your beehive and cross over to other beehives in your apiary or in neighboring beekeeping operations where they continue causing their unwelcome effects.



Lack of Space for Expansion

Backyard beekeeping may encounter a lack of expansion space in its later stages. The beginner beekeeper going into backyard beekeeping might have enough space for two or three beehives, but none for when they want to add more hives to their beekeeping operation. This is a common challenge to backyard beekeeping once the beekeeper has become sufficiently skilled. It prevents you from making use of available opportunities such as an increase in demand of your beehive products.



You can go into backyard beekeeping with a plan of how you will handle expansion, if you intend to add more hives to the beekeeping operation. Even when it may not be possible to add beehives in your backyard, you should not be deterred from starting beekeeping in your backyard, since it is a great way to learn about beekeeping. Once you are an experienced beekeeper and it is time to expand the beekeeping operation, you can easily move it to another place if you do not have the required space in your backyard.





A FINAL WORD

You do not have to be living in the countryside to be able to go into beekeeping. Even if you live in an urban area that has an ideal backyard, you can still keep your bees there. As long as you have checked with the local authorities in your area and ascertained that it is legal to keep bees, you can proceed to do so without worry.

You will also have to consult with your neighbors too, and assure them that you will ensure all the necessary precautions to ensure their safety.

