

Best Tips For Keeping a Honey Bee Hive



I clearly remember our beginning days of keeping a honey bee hive. Gathering tips from other bee keepers was most helpful in getting started. We chose a deep Langstroth hive. Despite some misgivings from family members our hive of honey bees got off to a good start.

Before we get into the types of hives, and the location lets discuss the bees themselves. For our first hive we chose to purchase a nuc (short for nuclear colony), from a local apiary.

This is not the only way to get started. You can also purchase a package of bees, and a separate queen, or you can capture a swarm if one happens to take up residence on your property.

Advantage of a Nuc when Keeping a Honey Bee Hive

The advantages of buying a nuc for first time beekeepers is that the bees are already starting to produce comb and honey when you bring them home. You simply put on your bee protective clothing and transfer the ten frames from the cardboard box, into your hive. The colony has already accepted the queen and they have mated with her so you have varying ages of brood ready to mature and take over as older bees die out.



When adding bees, first take the time to learn how to begin keeping a honey bee hive. It deserves some unique considerations. Just as when adding any animal to the farm, being prepared before the bees come home, will help you be

successful

Bees will require water, shade, a sturdy hive, and during some parts of the year, they may require feeding. Bees will fly a long distance every day to find enough pollen. Grasses, trees, herbs, flowers, and weeds all produce pollen that is used by bees to feed the hive. You don't need to have a flourishing flower bed in your yard to begin keeping a honey bee hive. Having a varied garden will help the bees get enough food.



Location for the Hive (Tip #1)

We chose a spot for the bee hive that received sun but was also some shade to protect the colony from overheating. The growth near the hive would provide some nearby pollen, and also provide some protection from the elements. The bees stayed active as long as the sun was shining. Orient the door away from any traffic area near your house or barns. In other words, you don't want to be walking through the flight path the bees use to get back to the door of the hive. The honey

bees are very protective of their home and if they feel a large intruder is attempting to enter the hive they get a little stressed!

Learn the Terms for Keeping a Honey Bee Hive

Apiculture is the practice of keeping and maintaining bees and their hives. The beekeeper is also referred to as the **apiarist** and the entire colony set up is called the **Apiary**. Bee keeping has grown in popularity in recent years and the raw honey, beeswax and royal jelly are much sought after products.



**TIPS FOR
SUCCESS WHEN
KEEPING A
HONEY BEE HIVE**



Types of Bee Hives

Skep – Long ago, beekeepers used something called a skep to house bees. This is no longer used because it is hard to remove the honey from the skep and this type of hive is difficult to clean and can become unsanitary. Although they are no longer used, skeps can be a decorative addition to a collection of vintage farming equipment.

Top Bar – The Top Bar Hive looks similar to a trough used for animal feeding. The bees make their own comb by drawing it down from the wooden bar inside the top of the hive.



photo courtesy of Pasture Deficit Disorder
<http://www.pasturedeficitdisorder.com>

Langstroth – In many parts of the country, the Langstroth hive is what you will commonly see. The Langstroth consists of wooden boxes called supers, stacked on top of each other. They

are sitting on a base called the foundation board, and topped with a lid, or cover. Inside, the bees create their comb and fill the cells with honey on waxed frames that hang vertically inside the super. Langstroth is the type of hive we chose to use.

Warre Hive – The Warre has been compared to a cross between a hollowed out tree and a top bar hive. The Warre Hives are smaller than the Top Bar and the Langstroth versions. I actually think I would like to try one of the Warre Hives one day.

What Additional Equipment is Needed When Keeping a Honey Bee Hive?

- Smoker
- Hive tool- helps with lifting the frames from the supers
- Honey extraction equipment
- Protective clothing
- Entrance feeder for fall and winter



the installation from the nuc box to the hive was very easy and simple

The first spring and summer

When our day arrived to pick up the NUC. I was unsure about having the box file box size container of live bees in the car with me! Once I met the apiarist and received the bees, my fears were put to rest. The bees were safely contained in a well sealed file box type container called a NUC. The bees seemed peaceful and fairly quiet. My neighbor and I headed back to her yard to install the bees in their new hive.

Queen Bee and Our New Hive

At the time, we only had one bee suit and it was not mine, so I was the designated photographer. It was still early in the morning and the bees were still sleepy so I was able to get fairly close with the zoom lens without upsetting the bees. The frames were transferred from the NUC to the super and the cover was put on top.

We made sure they had a shallow pan of water nearby, so they wouldn't tire themselves out getting a drink after all the excitement of moving day. That was about it for the installation. The whole process took less than half an hour and was drama free.



Watch for reaction to high heat days. (Tip #2)

Our bees started to collect on the outside of the hive, which is called bearding.

We noticed bearding on the hive during a spell of extremely hot summer weather. This means that the bees were hanging on the side of the hive. Lots of them were hanging in clusters on the outside of the hive.

I spoke with a local apiarist from the beekeepers association

and he asked if the hive was ventilated. Since I did not know what he was referring to, it was obvious that we had missed doing this. The fix was simple. Don the suit, find some small twigs and add a small twig between the layers of the hive to allow some air to enter. I guess we missed that tip, when setting up the hive. It's great to have a mentor when keeping a honey bee hive for the first time.



BEST TIPS FOR KEEPING A HONEY BEE HIVE

Is Ventilation Required All Year?

Ventilation is important even during the winter so, we will be leaving the twigs between the layers. If the weather is extremely cold, we can reduce the size of the door opening to keep the hive warmer. Check with your local beekeepers since your winter weather will vary from ours.

Once the hive was ventilated by inserting small twigs between the layers of the supers, and between the top super and the cover and lid, the bearding stopped. The bees were just too warm inside, and had decided to come out for some fresh air.

Fall and Heading into Winter (Tip #3)

Our hive successfully made it to fall. The bees multiplied and the supers were full of honey. We opted to leave all the honey the first winter. The hive may not be strong enough to withstand extreme cold and we never know what kind of winter we will have. We fed the bees sugar syrup to ensure that they would make plenty of honey to get the entire colony through the winter.

Cautions When Working with Honey Bees (Tips #4 & 5 & 6)

In late fall a hive check revealed that the bees had eaten a substantial amount of honey due to the fluctuation of warm and cold temperatures we had already experienced. For more on that story please read this post on Fall Checkup on the Hive.

Don't go into the hive without the protective clothing on. Even if you think you will only be a short minute.

Stay out of the bee's flight path and do not block their

entrance with your body. The bees get really testy about this issue. When they want to get to the door, please don't block their way. This is an essential safety tip when keeping a honey bee hive.

The best time of day to do any hive maintenance is mid morning. Most of the worker bees will be out of the hive. The worst time of day to try to work on the hive is late afternoon. The bees are trying to return home!



The Best Tip We Learned For Keeping Honey Bees (Tip #7)

My favorite advice that I give to anyone asking me how to start keeping a honey bee hive is to get a mentor. Even if your mentor is only available by phone, skype or other electronic means. A local beekeeper can add much to your experience because they are in the same climate as you and

your bees. You will have questions as you go along and having a mentor is invaluable.

Year one was extremely interesting and we learned so much about keeping honey bees. Unfortunately, after a fall and winter that swayed in extremes in the weather, our bees died. They did make it through an early cold snap in the fall, which was followed by a spell of very warm late fall weather.

According to a few beekeepers I spoke with, this caused the bees to think it was spring and go out foraging. When the honey bees returned to the hive, they were very hungry! The honey bees then ate all of the honey that should have been saved for the rest of the winter. The explanation makes sense in some ways. This year, we will start feeding later in the Summer and into early Fall.

Let me know what challenges and success stories you have from your first year of keeping honey bees.



You may also be interested in these posts on Bee Keeping

Installing the New Hive – Homestead Honey

How to Capture a Swarm of Bees – Homestead Lady