



Setting Up Your Apiary

-- any place where one or more colonies of bees are kept --

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What to Look For

There are several things to look for as you attempt to locate the ideal apiary site: sources of nectar, pollen, and water. Even in town nectar and pollen are relatively abundant. Many flowers, fruits, vegetables, trees, bushes, and weeds provide abundant sources of pollen and nectar, and bees will forage from areas in excess of 10 square miles around the hive to obtain them. If no natural source of water is available, set out water for your bees so they don't pester your neighbors' watering tanks, swimming pools, bird baths, or leaky faucets. A pan of water filled with gravel to keep the bees from drowning works well.

Additionally, your chosen location should have a wind break to protect the bees from the cold prevailing winds of winter. Wind breaks also can shelter your apiary from view. You don't want broadcast the location of your hives to the general public. Even though many people are afraid to approach bee hives, many others are not. Unfortunately, theft of a whole group of hives and massive vandalism are not unheard of among beekeepers. Situate your hives in hidden-away locations. No need to advertise for trouble.

A good mixture of sunlight and shade to protect the colonies from the intense heat of the late afternoon summer sun is also helpful. Colonies that receive either too much or too little sunlight under produce those with a nice mixture. When setting out your hives, avoid low spots where moisture and cold can accumulate.

What to Look Out For

You may generally choose to set up your hives either in the town or country. Most cities and towns permit beekeeping, but check on your local ordinances to be certain. If beekeeping is permitted in town, be careful to avoid having your bees declared a public nuisance. If this should occur, you will be forced to move your apiary.

Before you go to the trouble of setting up your apiary, talk with the neighbors if they are reasonably near. Getting answers to questions before you set up your hives can save a lot of headaches. Do the neighbors have young children who might inadvertently approach the hive? Are any of your neighbors allergic to insect stings? Are your bees likely to be attracted to your neighbors' properties for any reason in particular? Are there any penned or chained animals nearby? If answers to these questions don't make beekeeping in town look enticing, then consider places in the countryside -- in wastelands, pastures, truck farms, and orchards. Many people would love to have bees available to pollinate their crops, and a well-placed phone call could win you a ideal site to place your apiary.

Watch Out!

Diseases and pests, unfortunately, are not the only things that a beekeeper needs to worry about. Add to the list insecticides. Insecticides, if improperly applied (broadcast while bees are foraging, or allowed to run off into the bees' water supply, for instance) can lead to the death of foragers or an entire colony. Some insecticides leave residues that can be active for days after application and can either contact the bees directly or via mixing with nectar. Other insecticides are mistaken by bees for pollen, are gathered up, and delivered to the hive where they are fed to the brood. The end result is an insecticide kill.

If you will place your apiary in an area where widespread use of insecticides can be expected (fields, gardens, and orchards), check with those likely to apply them. High toxicity insecticides should not be sprayed on bee-pollinated plants during bloom. If this is to occur, be prepared to protect your bees by screening their entrance on the day of insecticide application. Provide additional protection from the sun so that the bees don't overheat and die from prostration. Beekeepers have certain rights under the law that will help protect both bees and beekeepers. Nonetheless, it is much wiser to be proactive than reactive when it comes to insecticides.

Setting Up and Arranging Your Apiary:

Elevate your hives by placing them atop bricks or wooden beams treated with preservatives to avoid termites and prevent rotting. When setting out your hives, tilt them so that rain won't come in through the entrance. Provide a ventilation hole near the top so that moisture doesn't accumulate within the hive. Damp hives leave colonies disease prone. Orient the hives so that their entrances face southeast or south, or any direction in between. Avoid placing a number of hives in a row as returning bees often become confused and drift back to the wrong hive. Drifting can be responsible for spreading diseases in an apiary, and will build up colony populations in the end hives at the expense of those more centrally located. Stagger the arrangement of your hives, or place them in a semicircle. Alternatively, place the hives among objects such as trees and bushes that can serve as landmarks. Some beekeepers who are forced to arrange their hives in rows paint the hives using varying light shades, or mark the entrances with different patterns, to help the bees distinguish one hive from another. Cut grass around entrances.

Registration Requirements:

In compliance with the Rules and Regulations of the State of Illinois, all apiaries in the state must be registered during November each year or within ten (10) days after acquiring ownership or possession of bees. Complete an Application for Apiary Registration form obtained from the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industries, Apiary Inspection Section, P. O. Box 19281 - Fairgrounds, Springfield, IL 62794-9281. Registration is free of charge. If you have never filed a registration form before, a beekeepers' registration number will be provided to you. This registration number must be prominently displayed in the apiary, and many beekeepers place this number on each hive as a sign of ownership.

Inspections:

The State of Illinois maintains a number of bee inspectors who regularly inspect apiaries in search of diseases. By law they are permitted to inspect any hives and colonies they find. Even though your apiary will be inspected from time to time, you should constantly keep an eye open for diseases and pests yourself. If and when serious diseases are found -- especially American foulbrood and European foulbrood -- you should respond quickly and appropriately. Remember, by protecting your own colonies, you also protect those of your fellow beekeepers.