

The Ten Commandments of Beekeeping

by Carl J. Wenning, copyright 1999, 2012

(Adapted from Keith Delaplane, *Honey Bees and Beekeeping*, 1993)

- I. **Thou shalt use only standard beekeeping equipment.** The Langstroth hive is the best arrangement of hive body and frames that we have today. It permits unprecedented access to the bees and their brood, and allows for complete interchangeability of parts. The modern hive respects bee space and permits regular monitoring of the colony for diseases and parasites. Traditional straw skeps, log gums, and clay pots are not permitted by law because they do not allow this access.
- II. **Thou shalt be considerate of non-beekeeping neighbors.** Be careful where you place your hives. Though it is legal to keep bees in town in most areas, consideration of your neighbors who might have small children, who are afraid of bees, or who are allergic to bees stings is paramount to successful and enjoyable beekeeping. Caution your neighbors if you plan to put a hive in your backyard, and avoid putting the hive in a place where bee flight paths cross sidewalks and play areas. Provide water for your bees so they don't bother others. Free honey can help sweeten an uncertain situation.
- III. **Thou shalt requeen regularly.** Requeening regularly can go a long way toward maintaining productive colonies. Requeening can maximize both brood and honey production, and is helpful in suppressing swarming and certain diseases. It is generally considered best to requeen with stock produced by commercial suppliers of bees as queens produced by your own colonies will rarely result in superior breeding.
- IV. **Thou shalt control diseases and parasites.** Every beekeeper should get to know his bees and the diseases and parasites that can affect them. Certain bee diseases such as foulbrood can be spread easily from colony to colony which can have disastrous effects. Get to know the signs of the more common bee diseases: American and European foulbrood, chalkbrood, sacbrood, and Nosema. Be aware of the debilitating effects of parasites such as varroa and tracheal mites. Get to know your medications (Terramycin, Fumadil B, Apistan) and be aware of how one can use grease patties and menthol. Apply these medications according to instructions so that you won't kill bees, produce resistant diseases and pests, or contaminate honey intended for human consumption.
- V. **Thou shalt maximize colony populations before the main nectar flows.** It can be an expensive mistake to build up the size of your bee colony on the main nectar flows rather than for the main nectar flows. Requeening, disease control, and feeding sugar syrup and pollen substitute can help achieve this objective. Control swarming by keeping young queens, reversing hive bodies during the spring, and supering appropriately. Don't tolerate marginal colonies. Requeen, medicate, and supply frames of brood to weak colonies, or merge them with other colonies. Remember, one large colony will produce more than twice as much as two half the size.

VI. Thou shalt super colonies according to their needs.

Provide plenty of space for bees to store their nectar before the nectar flows start. This will help control swarming, and encourage foraging. Remove the supers in late summer so that the bees will be encouraged to pack the brood nest heavily with honey for winter.



VII. Thou shalt take pride in honey and other hive products.

Keep your honey-handling equipment clean, and strain your extracted honey to remove particulate debris. Use standard honey jars, and resist the urge to sell or give away your honey in used canning or mayonnaise jars -- such packing looks cheap and unprofessional, and can impact negatively how the consumer thinks about honey. Use an appealing label, and never let your jars get sticky. Market your product with pride, confidence, and creativity.

VIII. Thou shalt protect thy beekeeping equipment. Beekeeping equipment can last for years if properly prepared and cared for. Consider using wood preservatives, pilot holes for nails, and a good paint job. Keep your hives off the ground where they can be subject to rotting, and fall victim to pests such as carpenter ants and termites. Protect your stored combs from the wasp moth by using paradichlorobenzene. Store your beekeeping supplies under clean conditions.

IX. Thou shalt help thy bees through winter. Treat colonies in the fall for foulbrood, Nosema, and mites. Make certain that you use two brood chambers for wintering, and that the bees enter winter with a full honey supply. Reduce hive entrances for the winter, and provide an upper entrance to provide an alternative access and as a means for assisting with the discharge of excess water vapor. Pack your hives if you anticipate a harsh winter, and always protect them from the wind. Check your colonies for food supplies in midwinter by hefting the hive. If the bees are running short of supplies, be certain to feed them sugar syrup. If brood rearing is beginning to take place to a significant degree before pollen is available in the spring, provide your colonies with pollen substitutes.

X. Thou shalt join and participate in a beekeeping association. Beekeeping organizations can be exceedingly helpful in your efforts as a novice beekeeper. They are often filled with knowledgeable and experienced persons who are most willing to answer questions and lend a helping hand. These organizations frequently have, as a benefit of membership, association rates for publications such as the *American Bee Journal*, *Bee Culture*, and *The Speedy Bee*. Most such organizations also publish newsletters such as the *Heart of Illinois Beekeeper* and the *ISBA Newsletter*. Most importantly, beekeeping associations help defend the interests of beekeeping and beekeepers. They deserve your support.