

# Getting into Beekeeping: Counting the Costs

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Perhaps the most common question we receive during our beekeeping course is, “How much will it cost to get started in beekeeping?” That’s an excellent question, and one that I’ll try to answer here. It is difficult to state precisely how much one will spend getting started. There are many variables such as preferred quality of materials, whether materials are bought individually or as part of a package, the amount of materials, kind of bees, size of materials, shipping distance, supplier, and so forth. Nonetheless, here is an initial answer to that question using information from the 2012 product catalog of Dadant & Sons, Inc. of Hamilton, Illinois.


Experienced beekeepers urge novices to start with two honeybee colonies. The reasons for this might become obvious during the first year of beekeeping but, in the mean time, suffice it to say that one colony of bees can be used to support the other should something happen to one of the two colonies. For instance, if one colony becomes hopelessly queenless, eggs and larvae from the second colony can be introduced into the first, allowing it to raise a new queen. Another reason is that it is more cost effective to operate two colonies than one.

The basic materials required to set up and work one beehive are listed below. The first column represents costs for the first year of beekeeping. The second column indicates costs for the second year. During the first year only sufficient materials are purchased to create and work a 10-frame 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>” double brood chamber Langstroth hive OR an 8-frame 6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>” triple brood chamber. Additional materials will be needed the second year as the bees fill their brood chambers to capacity with honey and brood, and begin putting excess honey into supers. Bees generally won’t produce surplus honey the first year unless really “pushed” with appropriate and timely feeding designed to maximize honey production; hence, the expenses for setting up one or more beehives can be spread out over two years.

The materials in the list below reflect my preferences for unassembled materials based upon several years of experience. Note that I do not always buy the least expensive materials. Many like to purchase materials fully assembled. Savings can be realized by doing otherwise.

## One Beehive -- First Year

## One Beehive -- Second Year

Dadant Beginner’s Kit (#1, 159.50 – one 10-frame 9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> ” brood box version; #2 174.50 – two 8-frame 6 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>8</sub> ” brood chamber version) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-standard beehive</li> <li>• 1 all purpose hive tool</li> <li>• 1 reversible entrance reducer</li> <li>• 1 bee smoker</li> <li>• 10 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>” grooved top bar frames</li> <li>• 1 hat veil pullover combo</li> <li>• 10 sheets plastic based foundations</li> <li>• 1 set of sting resistant gloves</li> <li>• 1 entrance feeder</li> <li>• 1 book <i>First Lessons in Beekeeping</i></li> </ul>	
Second 10-frame 9 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> ” brood box version with frames and foundation (to accompany Beginner’s Kit #1, ~\$40.00) Third 8-frame 6 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>8</sub> ” brood chamber with frames and foundation (to accompany Beginner’s Kit #2, ~\$40.00)	Four or more 8- or 10-frame 6 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>8</sub> ” supers with frames and foundation (~\$145 for four)
Package Bees (2 lb. minimum, \$95 - \$100)	New queen, bee brush, extractor, uncapping knife, uncapping tub, capping scratcher, jars and lids, honey labels, filters, honey buckets, queen excluder, etc.?
Medication (nosema, mites, hive beetles, etc., ~75.00)	
Feed (sugar, nutrient patties, etc., ~\$25.00)	

The cost for setting up one beehive comes to approximately \$400 for basic materials during the first year depending upon what you buy. Taxes and shipping may need to be added to these costs. Setting up a second beehive the first year will increase this cost to approximately \$315. Costs for one hive during the second year most certainly will include about \$175 for four supers with foundation and one replacement queen, or \$350 for two hives. Hence the two-year costs for one hive will be about \$575, and about \$875 for two hives. Second year costs can increase significantly if the beekeeper chooses to purchase an extractor, an uncapping tub, an uncapping knife, and many other things that beekeeping hobbyists often desire.

Once this initial investment is made, a well-maintained beehive can last for 30 years or more. There will be annual costs for queens, foundation, and medication, but at a relatively small expense. The above expense for a single beehive averaged over 7 years would amount to only \$80-85 per year. A typical, properly maintained Illinois honeybee colony will produce some 75-125 pounds of honey per year after the first year. Good beekeepers can produce more than 200 pounds per hive during a good year. Sales of honey at rates approaching \$6 per pound or more can easily pay for the purchase price of the hives, bees, tools, and supplies within a couple of years. Beekeeping, even on the small scale, can prove to be a viable business opportunity.

Always avoid buying used materials without expert advice such as your local apiary inspector! It is generally considered wisest and safest to purchase new materials only from reputable dealers.