

You've got the BUZZ, what next?

Fancy Keeping Bees?



First of all ...

Get some inside information. The best way to do this is to join a local Beekeeping Association. Use a search engine on the Internet to find your local group, or contact us at the web address shown. Courses are run by most Associations and usually cost around £50.00 + for several sessions, spread over the Spring and Summer. You'll meet other beekeepers and perhaps be introduced to a mentor who will help you with your own plans. There is usually a training apiary to provide experience in handling bees.

Or, you could start by doing a one-day or week long course.



Next step ...

Buying suitable equipment is a problem for beginners and should ideally be delayed until contact with a beekeeping association or an experienced beekeeper has been established. The most common hive type used in the UK is what is called the Modified National Hive (National for short). In Wales this hive is used by over 90% of beekeepers. At least initially, it is important to start with the type of hive that is used in your locality so that you have compatibility.

Where to start with bees

The ideal start for a new beekeeper is what is called a 'Nuc' (pronounced Newk) - which is short for nucleus. This is a Queen bee and bees with brood. A nuc is less intimidating for a beginner than a full colony and the two can grow together - the nuc in size and the beginner in experience. It is preferable that your starter colony is sourced locally and a beekeeping association will be able to advise you on this matter or even sell you a nuc raised by its members. Local bees are better adapted to your local environment.



Beekeeping is fun and bees are an essential part of our ecosystem.

Where do you find Suppliers?

Talk to beekeepers and they will recommend suppliers. There are many sources to be found on the Internet (some good some not so good) and we again suggest that you seek advice. Winter sales and beekeeping conventions are a good source of cut-price equipment. From time to time associations offer second-hand equipment for sale and, with the usual safeguards, this is an economic solution.

Essential equipment

A hive

Other equipment – bee-suit, gloves, hive tool and smoker

Additional (expensive) equipment such as a honey extractor can be borrowed or shared at least initially.



How much does a hive produce?

The amount of honey produced by a hive varies depending on the locality, available forage and the weather. Another major factor is the skill of the beekeeper and this will improve with time and experience. A yield of 15-20lbs/hive (7-9kg) is a conservative (average) expectation.

How is honey extracted?

Again, your local Association will help you. Often they have a honey extractor for hire or loan, or you could join up with another local beekeeper.

The method is to exclude the bees from the supers (where the bees store honey) and then spin out each frame using a centrifuge which holds several frames at a time. The honey drops to the bottom, is filtered, and bottled. Providing this is done under hygienic conditions this honey can be sold or you may just want to eat it yourself or give to friends.

Your Local Association



More information, secretary@wbka.com

How much time will it take?

Beekeeping is a seasonal activity. It commences in spring (March-April – depending on the season), peaks in May-July during which period regular inspection is required if swarming is to be controlled. The honey crop is usually taken in August and this is followed by preparation for the winter. Little attention is required during the winter except to ensure that hives are not damaged by the weather and do not run short of stores.

What about swarms?

For a bee colony swarming is their method of reproduction. Control of swarming is one of the most difficult aspects of beekeeping and will only be learnt through experience. Unless you are intending to keep bees in a built-up area, swarming is not a hazard and each association has members who will help collect swarms. A swarm of bees may look frightening but is usually quite benign.

What about books?

There are a number of books around and you can find these through the Internet. In addition the Welsh Beekeepers' Association to which every group in Wales is affiliated, produces a number of pamphlets.

Beekeepers will love to show you how they do it!



Will I be stung?

If you keep bees it is inevitable that you get stung from time to time. People vary widely in their reaction to bee stings. It is always quite painful at the time the sting is inflicted (after all this what the bees intend it to be – a deterrent) but after that the pains quickly declines.

Initially most people experience some swelling around the site of the sting and this may be itchy for a day or more. Regular beekeepers usually become less sensitive to stings with time. A few people are highly sensitive from the start and if the reaction shows signs of getting worse seeking medical advice is advised.

The likelihood of being stung can be reduced by keeping bees that are not over-defensive, by good handling by the beekeeper and, wherever possible, avoiding inspection when weather conditions are unsuitable.



Glossary

Hive – a structure which holds bees

Frames – these hold a wax superstructure for the bees to build on to use

Super – a box which hold frames which the bees use to store honey

Brood Box – a box which hold frames which the bees use to hatch eggs, and produce bees

Queen excluder – a mesh sheet between the brood box and the super which keeps out the Queen, but through which bees can pass

Smoker – produces smoke which calms bees