

North Carolina State Beekeeper Association

Best Practices for Urban Beekeepers

When one envisions beekeeping, they usually picture an apiary of white boxes out in the country with some attendant elderly gentleman puttering about with a smoker and a veil. This guy works magic and keeps those bees passive through some mysterious incantation and a puff of smoke.

In reality, beekeeping is practiced by folks of all ages. And though a veil, protective suit and a smoker are tools to assist in the process of managing bees, the only *magic* present is how adaptable and gentle honey bees really are. And how vital they are to our environment and food supply as a keystone pollination species.

That gentleness makes them ideal partners, not only in the rural environment, but also in the urban environment. Today, honey bees managed by beekeepers, can be found in most major cities (like downtown Manhattan and Chicago), on suburban lots, and even on the lawns of the White House and our state governor's mansion.

Unfortunately, honey bees, their gentle nature, and their importance are not well understood by most people. And those people are our neighbors. This document is intended to serve as a best practices guideline for anyone wanting to manage honey bees in close proximity of other people. Urban beekeeping can be practiced safely and discreetly, and hopefully, with some patience, lead to more appreciation for this magical little creature, our friend, the honey bee.

Number of hives

1. Relation to property size:
 - (a) Two hives on a small property should be considered maximum *Note, two hives is generally recommended for any beekeeper*
 - (b) Three to four hives could be possible on larger properties
2. Proximity to neighbors:
 - (a) Considerations should be given to areas where your neighbors are active in their yards and hives should not be placed near these
 - (b) Placement should be such that neighbors cannot see the hives and be constantly reminded of them.

Location

1. Check flight patterns or beelines
2. Presence of fence or shrubbery:
 - (a) Bees will fly 3-6 feet off the ground. Placement behind objects of 6 feet will prevent collisions with passers-by
 - (b) Elevated areas or roof tops will start bees flying at a higher level

- (c) Sunny sites make for less defensive bees. (Bees will establish definite flight paths. Sites that put flight paths above pedestrians help avoid contact.)

Camouflage

1. “Out of sight; out of mind”:
 - (a) Less visible hives are less likely to be vandalized or stolen
 - (b) They are less likely to be objects of worry or controversy
2. Paint hives to blend-in / shade of green or brown(Lessening their presence leads to less concerns by neighbors – reference “Proximity to neighbors” above)

Water and Food

1. A water source must be on the property:
 - (a) When bees are established water should also be available in the yard(if bees have an earlier source they will remain faithful to it)
 - (b) Water must be kept replenished and not allowed to run dry so the bees stay away from neighborhood pools, bird baths, or dog dishes
 - (c) Preferred placement is not too close to the hive (Large congregations of bees where children or pets are would be seen as a nuisance by neighbors/community)
 - (d) Over wintering bees need a water source in late winter even if it freezes at night (Honey stores must be diluted for feeding)
2. “Open feeding” is not recommended. “In hive feed” only

Queens

1. A young queen of a gentle stock is preferred
2. Re-Queen if the hive tends to be overly defensive (Various strains of bees can have more suitable behaviors for a given setting)

Manipulations

1. No top entrances to avoid orphan bees when the top super is removed
2. Judicious use of smoke
3. Try to make inspections when:
 - (a) Most field bees are in the field collecting nectar
 - (b) There is a nectar flow on
 - (c) The colony is not being stressed by predators, such as wasps
 - (d) Colonies are in direct sunlight
 - (e) Temperatures are moderate
 - (f) Neighbors are not having a lawn party or mowing their lawn
4. Keep the area clean of hive scrapings and such to avoid robbing and to avoid making the area attractive to wasps and other nuisance insects and animals
 - (a) Inspections sometimes can make bees more defensive over a larger area

- (b) Movement in this area will cause bees to investigate – E.g. a lawn party
- (c) Robbing bees can be very persistent
- (d) A hive being robbed can be overly defensive

Swarm Control

1. Regular Inspections:
 - (a) Ample room must be available as needed
 - (b) A young, properly mated queen can help
 - (c) As a civil contribution know how to capture swarms (Keeping city bees are not a leave and let be situation. Bee owners must be able to anticipate hive development and to the best of their ability take appropriate action. Young queens maintain better hive cohesiveness and are less likely to swarm)
 - (d) On an extended absence you should arrange for a contact person
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Knowledge

1. Should have or know some good references close at hand
2. City beekeepers need a good understanding of apicultural practices
3. Should consider joining a bee club
4. Consider provincially sponsored bee courses
5. Educate oneself of other beekeepers and your neighbors (Even a beginner beekeeper should have access to informational sources such as books, internet sites or experienced beekeepers. Understanding changes in the hive and possible reactions of the bees to various situations could avoid problems with your neighbors)

Honey Sales

1. Use regulation containers/new containers
2. Cleanliness of the product should be a major concern
3. Comply with honey grading regulations
4. Comply with NCSBA honey standards
5. Comply with state and federal regional health regulations

Neighbors

A jar of honey can go a long way in maintaining amenable neighbors

Safety

1. Use appropriate beekeeping protective gear or have it close at hand
2. Must be aware on how to safely handle the bees
3. The purchase of an EpiPen should be considered

Registration

1. Validate that you can keep bees within your municipality
2. Register with your regional NC State Beekeeping Inspector the number and location of your hives
3. It is recommended that you become a member of both your local (County) and the state beekeeper's association: the NC State Beekeepers Association
4. Consider liability insurance changed needed to your homeowners' insurance policy or consider separate liability insurance. Share with them your adoption of these recommended practices

Recommended Additional Information

Book: *The Backyard Beekeeper – An absolute Beginner's Guide to Keeping Bees in Your Yard and Garden*, by Kim Flottum

Web:

<http://www.ncbeekeepers.org/>
<http://www.ncbeekeepers.org/inspect.htm>
<http://outdoorplace.org/beekeeping/citybees.htm>
<http://www.citybees.com/>
<http://agdev.anr.udel.edu/maarec/>

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