



Beekeeping can be described as something of a niche activity that isn't as mainstream as other hobbies. But, if you get into it, there are several benefits to be had including some delicious honey.

In this article, we'll examine beekeeping UK, the supplies you'll need to get into it, and the steps to take as a beginner. Therefore, if you are an aspiring beekeeper, read on and gather more information about this prestigious practice.

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## **What is Beekeeping**

Beekeeping is the practise of maintaining bee colonies. Apiculture, which is the technical term for beekeeping has been around for ages with recent discoveries pointing to North Africa about 9000 years ago as the genesis of the practise.

While there are different types of bees, the honeybee is the most common one used in beekeeping. Their hives produce various products including beeswax, propolis, flower pollen, bee pollen, royal jelly, and, most importantly, honey. Also, these products can be sold, or kept for personal use.

Honeybees have been around for several centuries and are believed to have initially come from Southeast Asia. They are typically industrious creatures who start out as eggs laid by the queen bee. Later, they are nurtured by other worker bees and they grow enough to become part of the colony.

Beekeeping has several environmental benefits including crosspollination which helps grow a larger variety of plants.

### **What Are the Benefits of Beekeeping?**

Are there benefits to beekeeping? Yes. Several in fact, and in this section we'll be looking at some of them. Therefore, if you are looking for a reason to get into beekeeping, read on.

#### **Preserving Bees**

The fact that bees are beneficial to the environment has already been alluded earlier. Unfortunately, there are several factors that kill honeybees in their droves and we owe a duty of care to these creatures. To do this, beekeepers need to create an environment in which the bees can thrive and forage in peace. This practise is called natural beekeeping and it also involves protecting the bees from pests and other factors that could endanger them. Besides, bees also encourage healthy plant growth and their demise will only adversely affect the environment.

#### **Homegrown Honey**

Owning a honey source has a lot of benefits which include increased income and fresh honey for personal use. Honey has several uses, mostly sweetening things. It is also a great alternative to sugar as it doesn't have the same side effects. But, apart from that, honey has some other great uses and is rich in nutrients including potassium, zinc, niacin, riboflavin and so on. On top of that, honey has several health benefits and can be used against coughs, injuries, and even dandruff. Finally, it saves you money as you no longer have to go to your local store to score yourself some precious honey.

#### **Beeswax**

While honey is the most popular product of a hive, there are other products that can be derived. This includes Beeswax which is highly useful against high cholesterol, fungal skin infections, and other health issues. Not only that, but beeswax is also pivotal in the manufacturing process as it is used as a thickener, emulsifier, and stiffening agent. Besides, it is also used in candle making, cosmetics, soap production and so on.

Similar to honey, locally produced beeswax also saves you a tonne of money as you don't have to leave the comfort of your home to get some. Furthermore, homemade beeswax is devoid of any unpleasant additive that could stifle its effectiveness and it provides an excellent source of income in the process.

### **Pollination**

Pollination involves transferring pollen grains from the male anther of a flower to the female stigma of another. Through this means, plants can create offspring. This process is heavily influenced by bees as they act as the means of transport for the pollen grains from one flower to another. Therefore, if they are not around to do this job, it will be to the detriment of the plants, and by extension, our environment.

### **Low cost of maintenance**

While beekeeping equipment is required to successfully raise and foster honeybees, it doesn't cost as much as you would think. Also, once you get past the initial stage, bees are quite low maintenance. For instance, they don't need your help to maintain their hives, develop their honey, or attend to their queen. Therefore, you can keep a convenient weekly schedule when taking care of bees. You'll need to put some work in to harvest honey or protect the hive during winter, but once you take care of this, there isn't too much to do.

### **It's a Rewarding Experience**

Understandably beekeeping is not for everyone. However, if you are fascinated by bees, then keeping them can feel really rewarding. This is especially true when you consider the numerous benefits and environmental factors. Furthermore, some people find the process of taking care of bees very relaxing and while they can be pretty noisy when they get going, it feels great to be a part of nature in this way. Also, there is a thriving community of beekeepers who help each other out, and the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a niche space cannot be underestimated.

### **How Much Room Do You Need for Beekeeping?**

Bees can be fostered in the countryside, in a bustling city, or even on a small balcony. That said, there are a couple of things that determine how much space is required for your bees from the type of hive to the number of bees you hope to keep. Urban beekeeping has become more popular over the years and with it has come more tricks and techniques with which to manage space. Below, we'll discuss some of the considerations you need to think about when determining how much space you'll need for your bees.

### **Type of hive**

There are two major types of beehives: Langstroth and Top bar hives. These two have different designs which also affects the amount of space they need. For instance, the Langstroth is usually more vertical as it is essentially stacked boxes. It is usually the most common type used by people in urban areas and they are convenient due to how organized they are. On the flip side, they can become really heavy as time goes on.

Meanwhile, top bar hives are more horizontal and they are less invasive to the bees. However, they might require a bit more space and will most likely suit people out in the countryside a lot more.

### **Number of hives**

The number of hives you decide to work with affects the amount of space you'll need. For example, if you have just one hive, or two, you can easily keep that in your backyard, or balcony. However, if you have your sights set on owning numerous hives due to various reasons, then you'll need ample space to accommodate all the bees. Fortunately, beehives can be kept pretty close together with some beekeepers keeping them about 6-8 inches apart. However, if you prefer to keep them further apart, you can, the only drawback is that it increases the amount of distance you'll need to cover when carrying out maintenance.

### **Hive entrance direction**

During the day, the front of a beehive is a 'hive' of activity as bees come in and out, working and putting things in place for the hive. Therefore, you need to put some thought into the entrance of the hive so that it doesn't bother neighbours or other people who might be living around. This is especially important for urban beekeepers who might not have the luxury of space. On the other hand, if you are in the countryside with ample space, then you might not need to worry about the entrance as bees are pretty flexible. That said, there are a couple of other things to consider about the entrance of a beehive. One such consideration is pollination as the entrance of a beehive could make the process easier.

### **Local laws**

Depending on where you live there might be different local laws that govern apiculture. In some places, it might be required to be kept in a certain place or some distance away from other properties. Ensure you read all the relevant laws before setting up the space for your bees.

Besides, bees need ample space to take off and land and for this reason it is important to have some space in front of the hive. Furthermore, as explained earlier, beekeeping in an urban area comes with its set of challenges including small space, but there are a few hacks that you can employ. One of the most effective ones is using screens to redirect where the bees fly. Also, you could make use of a roof or a balcony which keeps the bees in a safe space that won't constitute a nuisance to neighbours.

Meanwhile, keeping a beehive in a countryside or suburban environment is probably easier as you'd typically have more space and will be surrounded by more vegetation.

## **Types of Hives**

There are two major types of beehives namely: Langstroth hives and Top bar hives. Both have different characteristics which makes them suitable for different environments. In this section, we'll examine both hives and explain what makes them so attractive to users.

### **Langstroth Hives**

The first and arguably the most common type of beehive is the Langstroth. This is a hive that basically consists of stacked boxes. It is a very attractive type of beehive to own as growing it doesn't require too much work and adding a new box on top of the last one is basically all there is to it. The box comprises ten frames which are hung inside the box and help to direct traffic. Furthermore, since it is so common, there are more resources with valuable information on how to adequately maintain them. Langstroth hives are suitable for people with smaller spaces as they can be kept close together and the placement of the frames help to direct bee flight upward where it is less likely to interfere with you or the neighbours. However, on the downside, these boxes can become really heavy especially in summer. Therefore, inspections and maintenance can become pretty difficult as it would require moving the boxes, including those on top.

### **Top bar hives**

As opposed to Langstroth hives which are vertical, Top bar hives are more horizontal. Therefore, the hive is built outward when new frames are added. This design is simpler than the langstroth and provides the bees with ample room to move about with obstruction. In addition, frames aren't necessarily required with these types of hives and bees are free to build honeycombs from scratch. All you need are some empty bars which create space for the bees.

Due to the style of these beehives, they are more common in the countryside or in suburban areas which have more space. There are various advantages to using a top bar. For instance, some top bars have a little window through which you can observe the bees at work without having to remove the screens. Therefore, you can watch the bees in their most natural state. On the flip side, the lack of frames in these hives means that combs are a lot more fragile and are more prone to damage. Also, there are no standard measurements which could be a problem for beginners. Therefore, several beekeeping for beginners' guides will advise that you purchase or build a Langstroth.

## **Beekeeping Supplies**

If you've decided to give modern beekeeping a go, there are a few pieces of equipment you're going to need to get started. In this section, we'll examine each one, why you need it, and what role it fulfills.

### **Beekeeper's Suit**

If you were a firefighter, you'll need a protective suit to work with, same with a fumigator. Similarly, if you're going to work with bees you will require a suit to protect you while you tend to them. You can work without one, but it is advised that you purchase it. Typically they protect you from bee stings and provide adequate support so you are capable of carrying out maintenance

with no challenges. That said, if you don't have the funds to get one initially, you can use regular clothing. Just ensure the clothes are thick and throw on a pair of durable socks to properly protect yourself.

### **Smoker**

A smoker is a device typically constructed with durable metal which emits smoke. The smoke functions to calm the bees while you work and prevents the bees from attacking or getting aggressive. Also, smoke helps to block off communication between bees by subsuming the pheromones that bees exude. Most smokers look like watering cans and by placing some twigs, pine needles, or wood chips into it, you can produce some decent smoke.

### **Hive Tool**

A hive tool is the quintessential piece of beekeeping equipment. It is a flat, handheld tool that is used for maintaining beehives. It features a sharp edge with which you can pry or loosen frames when necessary. They aren't expensive and they are really handy especially when the bees glue everything with propolis. However, if you would prefer an alternative, a crowbar or paint scraper works just as effectively.

### **Leather Gloves**

If you have your heart set on beekeeping, prepare to get stung at one point or the other. However, you can minimize the chances of this by arming yourself with the right equipment. One of the most important ones is a pair of beekeeping gloves which work to protect your hands and arms from getting stung while you work. While regular gloves only cover your hands, beekeeping gloves go all the way up to your elbows. Also, they feature leather material for your hands while fabric protects the rest of your arms. If you'd rather use regular work gloves, ensure you hold the wrists down to prevent bees getting into the gloves.

### **Veil**

A bee sting is pretty painful, even more so when it's on the face or scalp. Therefore, you need a veil to protect your face from stings. Not only that, bees are quite curious and will crawl into a small space if left unattended. This includes nostrils, or ears, none of which are nice places to be stung. Unlike the other tools on this list, there aren't many suitable alternatives to a veil, hence it is in your best interest to purchase one.

### **Bee Brush**

A bee brush is a soft bristled tool used to get bees off a surface. They are very important during maintenance and inspection. The bristles must be soft so as not to harm the bees which is why a regular brush isn't advisable. However, if you need an alternative, a paintbrush is a decent option.

## **Honey Extractor**

A honey extractor is a machine that obtains honey from a comb without damaging it. While immensely useful, it doesn't come cheap which is why you are advised to wait a little bit before purchasing one. Conversely, you could get a used one from somewhere or make use of a homemade iteration. The drawback of this method is that it might damage the comb, but this might be a necessary evil and as time goes on you can figure out more efficient ways to get honey.

## **How to start Beekeeping**

Once you've made the decision to go into beekeeping, the next hurdle will be how to start out. There are a few things you'll need to consider before embarking on this journey some of which we'll examine below.

### **Speak to neighbours and local authorities**

There are various laws that govern the practise of beekeeping in various states and regions. To ensure you don't fall afoul of these laws, it is advisable to speak to your local government about your new hobby/business. For instance, some regions have a limit on how large a beehive can be or how close to dwelling areas they can be. Also, it might not be a bad idea to give the neighbours a heads up as they might be inconvenienced by the bees.

### **Researching bees and beekeeping tasks**

You simply can't wake up one morning and start beekeeping as it most likely won't go well. Hence, reading up on bees and learning about them will go a long way in preparing you for this task. Not only that, but you need to familiarize yourself with the tasks and responsibilities of an average beekeeper. That said, it isn't too difficult and once you follow the right steps, there should be no problem.

As a beekeeper, you'll need to carry maintenance from time to time. Depending on your preference, a weekly, or bi-monthly schedule is acceptable when taking care of bees. More enthusiastic beekeepers might check in on the bees daily, but this could disrupt their work and is generally not advised.

Apart from that, you will also be responsible for the following tasks:

- Collecting honey, and other materials
- Splitting the colony where necessary
- Destroying extra queen bee cells
- Getting rid of diseased colonies

## **Picking the right spot**

We've discussed the amount of space needed to practise beekeeping. Apart from ensuring there is ample space, you also need to pick the right spot for the hive(s). To do this properly, there are a few tips you could use.

### **Protection from the elements**

Bees work well in a warm environment, but it is necessary to ensure it doesn't get too hot or this could adversely affect them. On the other hand, you'll need to protect them during the winter months. So, wherever you decide to place them, ensure they get some warmth.

### **Ample space between hives**

While beehives can be placed close to each other, it is usually better to give them some space. This provides ample space for take off and landing, and prevents the bees from getting in each other's way.

### **Water**

Like every other creatures, bees need water and it is necessary to ensure that there is a water source nearby

### **Hive entrances**

Keep in mind where the entrance of the hive is facing. This is because bees might deem humans or pets as a threat if the entrance is facing a walkway.

### **Access**

Ensure the hive is at a location that is easily accessible. Also, you should have a clear view of the hive in case of emergencies

## **Choosing a hive**

Choosing the right hive is dependent on several factors including space, maintenance, and so on. There are two major types of beehives and before you go for one, consider the pros and cons. For instance, a langstroth hive is easier to keep in an urban area.

### **Gathering the correct supplies and setting up**

We've already discussed the tools you'll need to set up a beehive. Depending on your budget, ensure you buy the most important tools first. These include: beehive, veil, bee brush, and a smoker. Some of the other equipment can be bought later. Once this is done, you can start setting up your colony.

### **Purchasing honeybees**

You might decide that getting the bees is the last thing on your list, however, there is some wisdom in buying them first. This is because you'll have time to pick the type of bees you want.

If you need some help deciding on the type of bees, you can research online, or ask one of the many bee associations around your area.

## **Types of Bees**

There are three major types of bees

- Worker Bee
- Drone Bee
- Queen Bee

### **Worker bees**

As the name implies, the worker bees do most of the work in the hive. They are also female, but they cannot reproduce and instead act as caretakers for the colony. Their job description includes providing the queen with food, collecting nectar, making wax and so on. Visually, they are different from the queen and are typically shorter. However, much like the queen they have stingers, but can only sting mammals once.

### **Drone Bees**

Drones are male and unlike their female counterparts don't do any work. Instead they mate with the queen. They can't even sting and due to the queen only needing to mate once might live their entire lives without fulfilling their roles. Drone bees are usually rendered homeless in the fall as their continued presence puts a strain on resources.

They are longer than worker bees and have larger eyes.

### **Queen Bees**

Everything in the hive is done in service of the queen bee. Every colony has just one and she is the only fertile bee. That said, she also works pretty hard laying eggs in the hive. The worker bees wait on her very need including disposing of her waste.

The workers decide on a new queen by picking a larva which is then fed on royal jelly. This continues for the rest of that bee's life.

Like worker bees, queen bees have a stinger. They also have larger abdomen which makes her easier to identify.

## **Beekeeping Course**

A Beekeeping course is an academic program that helps teach the basics of beekeeping and all the necessary skills to thrive in the space. Also, it provides knowledge about the business opportunities available to participants. It is important to take a beekeeping course as it exposes you to various beekeeping practises that will help you in the long run. Not only that, but you

learn quite a few skills including: How to start a colony, hive maintenance, site location depending on the weather, business skills, and beekeeping machinery.

There are numerous options when looking to attain a certificate in beekeeping and you can take courses from the comfort of your home. Additionally, some universities have beekeeping courses in their roster.

### **British Beekeeping Association**

The British Beekeeping Association is a body that was established to promote and grow the beekeeping craft. They are a great source of information for many young beekeepers. They are pretty helpful as they provide lecturers and speakers who can help broaden the knowledge of beekeeping. Besides, they have programs that target the young in a bid to get them interested in beekeeping. Finally, they advise the government on strategies that improve the quality of life for bees which, in turn, improves the state of the environment. For more information, you can visit their [website](#).

### **Conclusion**

Bees are beneficial to life as we know it and beekeepers are rendering a huge service to humanity. With the tips, points, and guides provided above, you can start your journey as a beekeeper with relative ease.

### **FAQs**

#### **How much does beekeeping cost?**

One of the biggest advantages of beekeeping is that it is an inexpensive venture. While you might initially have to spend some money to get started, it will probably make you more money in the long run. You can start beekeeping on a budget of less than £1000.

#### **How long do bees live?**

Typically, a worker bee has a lifespan of about 6 weeks during the active season. However, in the winter, they live longer, some surviving as long as six months. On the other hand, the queen bee lives for much longer and has a lifespan of about two to three years

#### **What do bees eat?**

Bees generally subsist on a diet of nectar. When worker bees choose a queen, they feed the larva with royal jelly.

#### **Do bees die when they sting?**

Worker honeybees have a stinger and once used on a mammal, they die. However, they can sting primates again and again. On the other hand, drone bees don't have any stingers at all.

#### **Why do bees swarm?**

Bees tend to swarm if due to overcrowding they split the colony. In such cases, a large chunk of the bees leave the existing hive to form a new one elsewhere.

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