

Ohio State Beekeepers Association

www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org

Best Management Practices for Maintaining Honey Bee Colonies in Ohio

(Revised 02/05/2013)

DISCLAIMER

This document is and will always be a work in progress, intended for regular update and revision. It offers guidelines for responsible beekeeping in the state of Ohio. It is not an instructional text; we strongly urge anyone interested in beekeeping to take a course on beekeeping (go to www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org for details on current course offerings). Likewise, this document is not intended to provide legal advice. It does not address practices related to selling honey or any other farm product; moving colonies, bees, or beekeeping equipment; or liability / insurance issues. Finally, this document represents the Best Practices advocated by the OSBA, not the state of Ohio.

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INTRODUCTION

Beekeeping has become increasingly popular. This set of recommended Best Management Practices (BMP) is an attempt to outline guidelines for responsible management to avoid creating problems. This document is intended as a reference and standard for honeybee management for the state of Ohio. It may serve as:

- A resource for information to enhance community confidence in the safety of Beekeeping activities.
- A standard reference for avoiding potential complaints or conflicts about beekeeping activities.
- A compendium of best management practices that all Ohio beekeepers are encouraged to follow.

Most beekeepers are “back yard/part time” beekeepers. We have bees for many reasons, i.e. we like to use or sell honey, we want our vegetable plants and fruit trees pollinated, or we simply like insects. Whatever the reason, we are and want to be good neighbors. OSBA was formed to facilitate the exchange of experience and to stay informed of recommended changes in beekeeping practices, including the use of pesticides and treatments, integrated pest management, new threats to honeybee health, and government regulations.

The recommended practices for maintaining honey bees in managed colonies include:

1. Comply with all homeowner association, Local, State, and Federal ordinances, regulations, and laws pertaining to beekeeping. Follow this link to the Ohio Revised Code regarding Apiaries and Honey bees <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/909> . For the Apiary registration form follow this link. http://www.agri.ohio.gov/public_docs/forms/plant/Plnt_4201-002.pdf . **(Apiary registration is REQUIRED by State Law)**

2. Will have sound knowledge of honey bee behavior and beekeeping and are encouraged to complete an Introductory Beekeeping course at a college or university, or offered by a beekeeping association or Master Beekeeper (often called a Short Course), and stay current on issues of colony health and management.
3. Attempt to have all colonies inspected at least once a year by your county inspector, or the State Inspector.(At this time not all counties have inspectors)
4. Maintain strong, healthy, populous colonies.
 - a. Remove or securely seal all empty hive equipment.
 - b. Remove or combine all weak colonies.
 - c. Properly treat with an approved product, following all label instructions, or remove all disease and/or pest infested colonies.
5. Practice proper management and control techniques to prevent colonies from swarming.
6. Maintain all colonies at least 10 feet away from property lines. (In accordance with local Laws)
7. Place all colonies less than 40 feet from property lines behind a barrier no less than 6 feet in height. Barriers should be of sufficient density to establish bee flyways above head height.
8. Maintain a water source within 50 feet of colonies or less than one-half the distance to the nearest unnatural water source, whichever is closest for urban and suburban apiaries.
9. Do not establish an apiary that is within 50 feet of any animal that is tethered, penned, kenneled, or otherwise prevented from escaping a stinging incident.
10. Avoid opening or disturbing colonies when neighbors or the general public are participating in outside activities or using machinery within 150 feet of an apiary.
11. Maintain colonies with honey bee races of European honey bees (EHB).
 - a. Purchase queens, packaged bees, and nucleus colonies from reputable sources outside of Africanized honey bee, (AHB), infested areas or localities adjacent to AHB infested areas. The current distribution in the U.S. can be seen at <http://ars.usda.gov/AHBmap> .

For a list of Ohio Suppliers visit www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org/resources/queen-nuc-and-package-suppliers

 - b. Re-queen when making divisions and splits of established colonies.
 - c. Replace queens in all captured or trapped swarms.
 - d. Replace queens in all colonies every two years.
 - e. Mark queens prior to introduction to splits, swarms, and colonies.
12. Replace queens and destroy all drone brood in colonies exhibiting defensive behavior that may be injurious to the general public or domesticated animals.
13. Treat all honey bees with respect. Treating all honey bees with respect is a fundamental pillar of beekeeping as honey bees are indispensable and important to the human food supply.

Education

The first and most critical step in responsible beekeeping is education. All beekeepers should have a solid understanding of honeybee biology and basic beekeeping methods. The OSBA also encourages all beekeepers join the OSBA and enroll in the OSBA Master Beekeeper program.

We strongly suggest that new beekeepers take an Introductory Beekeeping course at a college or university, or offered by a beekeeping association or Master Beekeeper (often called a Short Course), and stay current on issues of colony health and management, **and read at least three different beekeeping guides.**

Here are some books that the OSBA recommends:

- The Backyard Beekeeper: An Absolute Beginner's Guide by Kim Flottum (2010)
- The Beekeeper's Handbook 4th edition by Alphonse Avitabile & Diana Sammataro (2011)
- Beekeeping for Dummies 2nd edition by Howland Blackiston, forward by Kim Flottum (2009)
- First Lessons in Beekeeping by Keith S. Delaplane (2007)
- Natural Beekeeping: Organic Approaches to Modern Apiculture by Ross Conrad (2007)
- The ABC & XYZ of Bee Culture: An Encyclopedia Pertaining to the Scientific and Practical Culture of Honey Bees 41st edition published by the A. I. Root Company (2007)
- Beekeeping: A Practical Guide by Richard E. Bonney (1993)
- The Hive and the Honey Bee by Roy A. Grout (1992)
- Biology of the Honey Bee by Mark L. Winston (1991)
- Honey Plants of North America by John H. Lovell (1926)
- Better Beekeeping by Kim Flottum (2011)
- Bee Culture Magazine (Monthly, Published in Medina, Ohio)
- American Bee Journal (Monthly)

Beekeepers should stay informed of recommended changes in beekeeping practices, including the treatment of parasites and illness, threats to honeybee health, and government regulations. One way to do so is to become a member of a beekeeping association that holds regular (preferably monthly) meetings. For a list of associations visit www.ohiostatebeekeepers.org and click on the "Associations" link.

Disease Control

There are a number of honeybee diseases and pests for beekeepers to be concerned with. Some, like American Foulbrood, are extremely contagious. American Foulbrood can only be destroyed by burning the bees, honey, wax, and woodenware. Antibiotics, which are allowed in Ohio, for the treatment of American Foulbrood only mask the disease, it does not destroy it. Beekeepers should be extremely cautious about mixing hive equipment and purchasing used equipment.

It is incumbent on beekeepers to manage all disease and pests, including parasitic mites, to ensure colony health and honey quality.

Swarming

While swarming is natural honeybee behavior, it is one that should be prevented or minimized, especially in urban and suburban settings. Two primary causes of swarming are congestion and poor ventilation in the hive. To avoid these conditions, beekeepers should consider:

- Brood chamber manipulation
- Colony division
- Addition of supers for brood rearing and honey storage
- Replacement of old or failing queens

These and other swarm management practices are explained in detail in most good beekeeping textbooks. When a swarm occurs, efforts should be made to collect the swarm. Swarms captured from locations where the origin of the bees may be questionable should be monitored frequently for abnormal defensiveness.

Considerate Hive Management

Before setting up your hives it is a good idea to inform your neighbors where you intend to place the hives. Respond to and discuss their concerns. An informed neighbor is more likely to be an understanding neighbor. Beekeepers should take into account that weather conditions influence bee behavior and plan to work bees when conditions are favorable. Beekeepers should make sure that neighbors are not working or relaxing outdoors when they open hives and should perform hive manipulations as quickly as possible with minimum disturbance to the bees. Extended hive manipulations, particularly when removing honey, should be carefully planned to accommodate neighbors' activities. Smoke should be used when working bees. Hive entrances should be smoked before mowing or trimming in the hive area. Clippings and exhaust should be directed away from hive entrances.

Hive Placement

Correct placement of hives is a very important consideration for responsible beekeeping in urban and suburban settings. Wherever possible, it is recommended that hive openings face toward the southeast. It is best to place the hive in a sunny area, not on the top of a hill, nor at the bottom of a hollow. Hives must be placed in a quiet area of the lot and not directly against a neighboring property unless a solid fence or dense plant barrier of six feet or higher forms the property boundary. Hives should be kept as far away as possible from roads, sidewalks and rights of way. Flight paths into the hive should remain within the owner's lot. Barriers, including solid fencing, hedges and shrubs more than six feet high may be used to redirect the bees' flight pattern. Beekeepers are encouraged to post signs at byways near the apiary to alert neighbors and passersby to the presence of hives in the area.

Colony Temperament and Behavior

While generally docile, honeybees can sting. A colony's temperament is determined by its queen's characteristics. Its behavior is affected by temperament, health and environmental factors such as weather and proximate activities. Every effort should be made to maintain a docile and non-defensive colony. Guidance on selecting queens, maintaining hive health, and mitigating environmental consequences follows. OSBA is engaged in an effort to develop methods for its members to raise native queens which are capable to withstand our severe winters and which result in gentle behavior.

Conclusion

The above information is meant to serve as a guide only, with the exception of following all State and Local Laws, and will not be suited to every Beekeeper in every situation.

We at the OSBA would like to welcome you into the Beekeeping family. Good Luck and enjoy the ride!