Reasonable Expectations

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Beekeeping Now and Over the Long Haul

When you wake up you will say, “Is seven bee hives enough?”
In reality there are....

• Bee Havers

• Bee Keepers

“The first ten years I had bees. I didn’t keep bees, I killed them.”

- Spencer Marshall, commercial beekeeper
Steps in Becoming a Beekeeper

• Acquire a basic knowledge of honey bee biology and seasonal life cycle of colony
• Become familiar with hive components and other equipment
• Gain experience in working with the bees - what to do, what not to do
• Learn what to look for
• Develop an idea of how to react to colony conditions
Responsibilities, Time Requirements, Regulations

• Responsibilities
  – To family and neighbors
  – To other beekeepers

• Time requirements
  – Time to work bees – about one hour /week/hive
  – A few hours to assemble and paint equipment
  – Time to read beekeeping literature, attend meetings

• Regulations
Yearly Goals

• Keeping your colonies alive

• Spring: Peak hive population and strength as main nectar flow begins
  • Pollination
  • Splits
  • Honey production

• Fall: Strong, healthy colonies to raise bees that raise winter bees
Some Basic Points

• Beekeeping is much harder than it seems.
• It is not magical or a path to enlightenment.
• Bees are feral livestock. You will kill many.
• Bees don’t know their keeper.
• Bees cannot sense a person’s fear.
• Your main goal is to keep your bees alive.
• Use common sense.
More Basic Points

• There are many ways to keep bees.
• Avoid those who know the TRUTH.
• Enjoy yourself.
• Avoid getting angry or frustrated at
  – Beekeeping
  – Other beekeepers
  – Beekeeping organizations
  – Yourself
• If you want to “save the bees” plant a garden. Don’t start a hive.
Keys to Success

• Start with 2-6 hives.
• Begin with Langstroth equipment.
• Study a couple of good beekeeping books.
• Open your hives often and delve into them.
• Keep records
• Avoid the internet.
• Don’t fixate on “the best” or on gizmos.
• Join a bee club or two and attend meetings.
More Keys to Success

• Subscribe to beekeeping magazines.
• Find a partner at about your level.
• Find a mentor or two. Don’t depend on them.
• Take your stings. Talk to your MD re: EpiPen.
• Admit and respect your ignorance.
• Remember the 2^{nd} year is harder than the 1^{st}.
• Be willing to spend money on bees.
• Study mites and how to control them.
6/21/99
Tom & Louie,
Thanks for
Relocating the wasps
& the education on
honey bees.
It was an honor
meeting S.F's own
Official Bee Keeper.
Best wishes.
Don & Lorinda Willens
So Are Partners
Three Other Points

• Bees do nothing invariably.
• Anyone who can make $1,000 with bees could make $2,000 doing almost anything else.
• If you want to make money in the bee business, sell stuff to beekeepers.
Unwittingly, Raymond wanders into the hive’s company picnic.
Figure 2. Typical mite population dynamics for a temperate climate. The curve is keyed to the colored brood status bars at the bottom. You can fill in the dates at the dotted lines for your area (the early September peak is typical). For example, if you live in the north, your blue bars would be long, and the green bars short. This particular colony would likely survive this season, but not the next, without treatment over winter.
Figure 1. Simplified bee and mite population growth curves for a temperate climate. The mite growth curve lags behind the bee curve. Note how the number of mites per hundred bees greatly increases in fall. A colony is unlikely to survive a fall infestation rate this high.
Aspects of Spring Management

- Plentiful and healthy brood
- Plentiful food stores
- Swarm mitigation
- Adequate space for brood rearing and honey storage
- Mite assessment and control

Inspect hives at least every ten days
Sample for mites monthly

What are your goals for your colonies?
Opening, Inspecting, Closing Hives

• Get into your hives every week to ten days
• **Have a goal every time you open a hive**
• Use smoke but not too much
• Don’t crush bees (pull second frame in from wall)
• Take your time
• Take into consideration
  – Neighbors
  – Weather
Feeding

• Sugar syrup
  – to stimulate bees to build wax for comb
  – when requeening, to promote queen acceptance
  – many types of feeders: entrance, top, frame, etc.
  – there is no good, easy way to feed syrup

• Pollen substitute
  – as a protein source to stimulate growth
  – can be feed as patties or as dry powder
Queens

A healthy, productive queen is key to a successful colony

• Brood pattern is measure of queen quality

• Reasons to requeen
  – Questionable brood pattern
  – Swarm control
  – Aggressive bees
  – Mite control and disease

• Marked queens are easier to locate and to determine if old queen has been superceded
Swarm Management

Factors related to swarming, and possible countermeasures

• Crowded brood nest
  – Add supers
  – Provide more room for queen to lay
    • Reverse brood boxes
    • Replace frames of honey in brood chamber with comb or foundation
  – Divide colony
• Older queen
  – Replace queen annually, or more often
• Presence of queen cells
  – Check colony at least every ten days
  – Destroy queen cells (but find existing queen first)
  – Destroying queen cells will not always prevent swarming
More Swarm Management

If one of your colony swarms, don't panic. Try to capture the swarm and learn what the bees just taught you

• What do your records tell you?
• When were you last in the colony?

Swarm traps and bait hives are Siren to lure you onto the rocks of a bad year

Louie’s advice – Swarms bring good luck
Bee Stings

- Bees sting to defend their colony and stores
- As a beekeeper you **will** get stung
Avoiding Stings

• Keep gentle bees
• Wear a veil and light colored clothing; avoid wool
• Open colonies in the middle of the day and when the weather is warm
• Work smoothly and slowly
• Avoid crushing bees
• Use smoke but not too much
• Remove stings immediately and smoke sting site
• Avoid lawn mowers, weed whackers near hives
Bee Sting Reactions

- Local reaction – itching, redness, minor swelling
- Large local reaction – major swelling
- Systemic reaction – anaphylaxis
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Nausea
  - Whole body itching
- Toxic reaction – reaction to venom of many stings

- Treat local reactions with ice
- Consult your doctor about allergy issues and a prescription for an EpiPen
Varroa

• Whether you treat for mites or not is your choice
• If you think about not treating, think about your neighboring beekeepers
• If you do treat, vary the miticide
• Test your colonies for mites at least once a month
• Test before and after you treat
• If you don’t treat your colonies will die. If you do treat they may die anyhow
Varroa

Honey Bee Health Coalition

A good resource for information on Varroa, including sampling methods, acceptable mite levels, and treatment options

Varroa is Not the Only Threat to Our Bees!

- American Foulbrood
- European Foulbrood
- Chalkbrood
- Nosema
- Tracheal Mites
- Wax Moths
- Skunks and Bears
- Ants and Wasps
American Foulbrood

• Serious disease that can affect other hives
• Symptoms are ropy larvae, sour odor, scattered and depressed pupal cappings
• Antibiotic used as prophylactic and treatment
• Usually requires destroying colony, burning hive
Other pests

• Bears – protect hives with electric fencing
• Skunks – raise hives, use carpet tacking strips
• Wasps – close entrance down to a small opening to make it easier for guard bees to defend. Also useful are screened entrances.
• Ants – usually not a problem in Oregon
• Small hive beetle – not yet a problem in Oregon
Human Pests

• Unduly concerned neighbors (NIMBY)
• Vandals
• Irresponsible beekeepers
• “Experts” – local and internet
• Beekeeping “entrepreneurs”
“If you see me running. Then things have gone poorly and you should run too.”

-Amsey M., the Beekeeper
In Closing

Stay together
Learn the flowers
Go light

-- Gary Snyder