

A Quick Beginners Guide to Getting Started.

Background:

If you had started keeping bees 100 years ago all you would need to do was to buy some bees, buy a hive and get going – a book would help and a friendly neighbour who kept bees would almost certainly live not more than half a mile away, and they would help too. Beekeeping used to be a necessary part of the household economy for country folk right across the country with a very high percentage of beekeepers in every village.

Today bees and beekeeping has new problems which the beekeeper must be able to handle if his bees are to survive. These are problems related to mites, a lack of forage compared to the forage available 100 years ago, a reduced immune system and of course resultant disease.

Today a new beekeeper needs to think seriously about doing a beekeeping course where she/he will learn how to manage bees, disease and anticipate problems rather than solve them after they have arisen.

Beekeeping Courses:

Beekeeping courses are available in some areas from the local beekeeping associations. Local councils around the country sometimes have beekeeping courses on their list of Adult Education courses.

Buying Equipment and Tips:

It is probably best not to buy any equipment until after you have finished the course you are doing, as the course may influence the equipment you wish to buy. But if you have itchy feet and you just cannot stop yourself, then here are some tips.

Buying Beekeeping equipment can be an endless pit of money spent. Here are some tips to help you spread the spending over a few years.

- 1) Don't buy a whole beginners kit as sold by the large beekeeping suppliers. That package may seem very cheap, but you will not need a lot of that till your second or third year of beekeeping.
- 2) In terms of hardware, when you start all you need is one brood box, with 10 frames, and wax foundation; a ventilated floor, a crown board; a super with no frames or wax for the first year, as this super is only to put your feed in; and a roof.
- 3) You can save money by getting a cheap boiler suit rather than a very costly bee suit. You can get a veil for around £10 and a boiler suit from your local builders merchant.
- 4) You will need a smoker and a hive tool.
- 5) It is normally a good idea to have 2 hives as a minimum. In this way, if you have problems with one colony the other can be used to get you out of trouble.
- 6) ALWAYS BUY YOUR BEES FROM A REPUTABLE BEEKEEPER TO AVOID THE SPREAD OF BEE DISEASES. Don't buy bees outside your area.
- 7) Bees are usually delivered at the end of June or early July, but you will need to book them early to get them the same year. Make sure they come on the correct size of frames for your hives.

There are many different kinds of hive and they are all different sizes, so the equipment is not usually interchangeable. In the North of England we tend to use British National hives and if you want to be able to exchange kit with other people (like buying bees, which

come on frames, which will have to fit into your hive) you will need to have the same kind of hives as the people around where you live. In Scotland the Smith hive is popular and as you go further down England the Langstroth Hive gets more and more popular. So find out what the people around you use and get the same kind of hives. For details on where to buy see our links page <http://www.beekeepingcourses-north.co.uk/LINKS/Links.html>.