

BEGINNERS' BOX

TBA does a wonderful job with *The Journal*. *The Journal* covers a wide variety of subjects that interest beekeepers of all levels. TBA has also started a new program that offers a free year's membership to first year beekeepers who join a local association. Membership includes a subscription to *The Journal*, so I thought it would be good to have a regular article focused on information for the new beekeeper.

If you have been keeping bees for more than a year, you are familiar with the statement: Ask 10 beekeepers a question, and you will get 14 answers. All those answers can be a little overwhelming to a beginner. Therefore, I will endeavor to present some basics for new beekeepers.

TERMINOLOGIES

BEEKEEPER Someone who keeps honey bees. There are two categories: level of beekeeper and type of beekeeper.

Level: TBA defines a *small scale* (sometimes referred to as *hobbyist*) beekeeper as someone with 25 or less hives. A *sideliner* has 26-300 hives, and a *commercial beekeeper* has over 300 hives. There is a lot we can learn from commercial beekeepers and their years of experience. I have often heard, "He's a commercial beekeeper, and he does it this way." One thing a beginner should keep in mind is that commercial beekeepers are running big operations and their practices are geared towards productivity and the fastest way to accomplish tasks with that many hives. Some ways they do things may not be the best practice for success for beginners but are the most practical on a large scale calculated for minimal failure. Commercial beekeepers are not wrong, they are simply trying to run a profitable business by the numbers.

Type: *Bee-Haver, Chemical-Free, Organic or Traditional?* Warning, I might be opening a can of worms.

A *bee-haver* is sometimes used in a derogatory sense. It refers to someone who keeps bees with very little or no intervention. In other words, "Just let the bees be bees." However, most beekeepers feel that keeping bees is a responsibility. Caring for those bees is like having a dog or cat. You need to make sure they have food, water and a flea collar.

Chemical-Free Beekeeping: I recently read that 90% of beekeepers treat their hives with chemicals. In recent years, there has been a movement towards chemical free beekeeping. I see two levels to these beekeepers. Some take the approach to not put ANY type of chemical in the hive while others have varying levels of what they will put in the hive. For example, some beekeepers use poisons in a hive beetle trap and some use essential oils. I've heard beekeepers say they are chemical-free beekeepers but use formic or oxalic acids because they are "organic acids." Thus, there are varying levels of being chemical-free. Being chemical-free, at whatever level you decide, requires more active management and more learning. A best practice is to choose a type of honey bee that is more hygienic and can tolerate chemical-free management.

Traditional refers to beekeepers that typically treat their hives with chemicals for pests and diseases. Many treatments are done in the spring and fall before or after any honey supers are placed in order to not contaminate the honey stores the beekeeper is going to harvest. Keeping bees in a standard Langstroth hive is also considered traditional.

Organic: This is a matter of how one defines organic. It is my understanding that there is no place in the US that will support a hive that the bees would be isolated from getting into pesticides from neighboring plants and field in their foraging range. Thus it is my opinion that those bees or the honey are not truly "organic" as the general consumer understands what organic farming is. Other definitions vary.

TYPES OF HIVES: There are many types of honey bee hives.. In the U. S., there are three types that are commonly used. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Research which one will fit your needs best.

The Langstroth Hive is the most common and almost exclusively used by sideliners and commercial beekeepers for its superior system of harvesting honey and transportability. Langstroth hives, often referred to as box hives, are the traditional route.

Top Bar Hives have gained a lot of interest in recent years with newer beekeepers only wanting a few hives. They are also popular with gardeners who are mostly interested in bees to pollenate their gardens. Top bar hives do not move easily but offer a system of keeping bees that does not require any heavy lifting. There are a few sideliners in Texas running top bar hives.

Warre Hives (pronounced WAR-ray) have some following in the U. S. Warre Hives are a French design and comprised of a stack of identical boxes fitted with top-bars but no frames. They have their own system of management.

Langstroth Boxes: In my first year while talking with other beekeepers, I was confused about brood boxes, supers, deeps, mediums, shallows, 8-frame, 10-frame and so on. Some of these terms are sizes of boxes and some are the usage or purpose.

Sizes: *Deeps, mediums* and *shallows* are the common sizes; and there are a few others sizes just to confuse things. All Langstroth boxes are 19 7/8" long. Frames are sized to the height of the box and are all the same length and width.

Number of frames	Width	Length
5 frame	9 1/4"	19 7/8"
8 frame	13 3/4"	19 7/8"
10 frame	16 1/4"	19 7/8"

Deep	9 1/2" tall
Medium	6-5/8" tall
Shallow	5-11/16" tall
Comb Honey	4-13/16" tall

Types of boxes: *Brood* and *supers* are the most commonly referred to boxes. The bees use the box for a specific purpose. Bees will raise brood in the lower boxes (brood box) and store honey in the upper boxes (supers.) The size of the box does not matter. The traditional method is to have deep boxes on the bottom for brood and to add medium or shallow boxes for honey supers. You may hear of a beekeeper who "runs all mediums." In this case, the beekeeper will have all medium boxes, the lower ones being brood boxes and the upper ones being supers. On rare occasion, I've heard of a beekeeper having all deeps. A deep filled with just honey is VERY heavy, close to 90 lbs. A medium super full of honey is about 60 lbs. There are some advantages to having all the same sized boxes, but then you need more boxes just for brood. Most commercial beekeepers use deeps for brood and mediums for honey supers. I will go more into the size of a hive in the next *Beeginners' Box*. As you listen to and read articles by other beekeepers, take terms like deeps, mediums, brood and supers in context. They may say "deep" when they are referring to a brood box.

Buying Bees: There are three ways to purchase honey bees, *packages, nucs* and *hives*. A package of bees typically comes in a screened box with three pounds of bees and a queen in a cage. The package is added to a hive and the queen cage installed. In a package, the bees are generally not from that queen. Keeping the queen in her cage gives the bees time to get used to her scent so she will be accepted as their queen. The queen cage is plugged with candy that the bees will eat so that the queen is released. Nuc is short for nucleus. It is a colony that is already established but not large enough to be productive. Nucs are often 5 frames of bees, comb with brood and an established queen that is already laying eggs. Nucs come in a temporary cardboard box or a small wooden box and need to be put into a full sized box along with enough frames to fill the box. Nucs give you a good jump-start on establishing a strong hive. Bees from packages or nucs will need to be fed to help build the colony. Packaged bees need more feeding because they have to build comb for the queen to start laying. In buying a hive you get the bees, queen and a full set of equipment (bottom, box, frames and top.) Purchasing hives tends to be a bit more expensive.

Slang terms: While talking to seasoned beekeepers, you may hear some confusing terms.

Nectar flow or flow: A time when several flowers or trees are in bloom that are producing nectar the bees like.

Dinks: a weak or very weak hive. Commercial beekeepers see these of little value.

Dead-outs: A hive that is dead, absconded or such. It was a hive but now just the basic equipment.

Honey-bound or plugged-up: During a heavy nectar flow, bees get super busy bringing in nectar and start filling every available cell with honey to the point where the queen does not have empty cells in which to lay eggs.

Drop-in-a-Queen: They don't mean literally. There is a process for introducing a new queen that needs to be followed.

Split: Making additional hives from a strong hive. As in splitting one hive into two hives. One will need a queen.

Walk-away-split: A split where you make sure the queenless hive has eggs and let the bees raise a new queen on their own.

Double-deep: A hive with two deep boxes of bees and brood, a strong hive. The goal for a good honey harvest.

IPM: Integrated Pest Management. A common sense approach to pest management. IPM is a broad based approach that integrates practices for economic control of pests. IPM can also mean implementing something that combats multiple pests or taking several actions to combat one particular pest.

Bee Informed. That clever comment, "It was on the internet, so it must be true." There is a lot of good information and a lot of bunk that can be found on the internet. I recommend reading a published book or a few published books. With a good foundation of the basics, you can be a better judge of what sounds like a good idea or plain garbage. Don't be afraid to ask seasoned beekeepers questions. This is where the real value is in your local beekeeping association where local beekeepers can answer local questions. Yes, you'll have to decide which of the 14 answers you got, if you asked 10 people the same question, is the best choice for you.

Joyful beekeeping,

Cameron Crane