

# BEGINNERS' BOX

*From Cameron Crane, Liberty County Beekeepers*

Greetings to those pursuing learning more about beekeeping. As I'm writing, we are still in the heat of summer. Our first cool front is scheduled to be here soon. By the time you read this, we should be well into the fall honey flow as the asters and goldenrod are in bloom. In this installment of the Beginners' Box, I'm going to cover the three I's: Inventories, Information and Involvement.

## INVENTORIES

Are about recordkeeping. Beekeeping has been described as a skill, and it has also been called an art or craft. Whichever approach you take to beekeeping puts you on a path. Are you mapping out that path? Keeping good records helps you understand where you have been and where you and your bees are now. The hive grows, flows and adapts to the seasons. Every area has its own details of which plants are going to bloom at what time. Knowing when the major and minor nectar flows of your area occur helps you anticipate the needs of your bees. Since you know when the flows are about to happen, you should also know when you need to have supers ready to add to the hive.

If you have more than one or two hives, you should be keeping records on how fast did each colony build, when supers were added, how many boxes were harvested, and how full the frames were on a certain date. This is some of the information you will need to manage your hives effectively. At each inspection, you should note how many hive beetles you saw, the activity in front of the hive, were the bees bringing in pollen, did you see nectar being stored, how aggressive were the bees, and what did the brood patterns look like. Being in the Houston area and having to deal with aggressive bees from removals and swarms, I keep up with the "meanness" of my hives so I know which ones I want to re-queen. All this information helps anticipate the current needs of the hive and will help with your choices in the following year.

Find a system that works for you. I've heard some people place a brick on the top cover, and the placement has a coded meaning. Last year, I used the Hive Tracks System found at [www.hivetracks.com](http://www.hivetracks.com) Hive Tracks is a great tool for keeping inventory. However, I'm not keen on texting on my phone, so using the phone app to take notes in the field wasn't for me. I then made notes on printed Hive Tracks inspection sheets and updated my notes when I got home. I found that as my number of hives increased that I wasn't making the time to sit at the computer to do updates on my hives. So, if you have less than 10 hives, I'd recommend taking a look at Hive Tracks.

I've also tried a note pad and a clip board when visiting my hives and found I didn't like fooling with paper and pen in the bee yard. This year, I changed out most of my traditional top covers for garden top covers and kept a Sharpie in my smoker/hive tool kit. I made notes about the hive on the top cover. Each visit, I also took photos of the hives before I started and after I finished. When I saw bees working flowers, I took a picture. I saved the pictures on my computer in a beekeeping folder by dates. I've referred back to my photo inventory often, and that's what works for me.



As you start the next year of beekeeping, you will have decisions to make. Your records should give you direction and help you plan.

## INFORMATION

Is about learning. There are many places to find information and ways to build your knowledge about bees and beekeeping. Books, bee schools, seminars, clinics, pod-casts, the Internet, beekeeping clubs, mentors and conventions are just a few avenues. When I first got interested in beekeeping, I thought all I'd need were a couple of good books; and then, I'd know all about beekeeping. Now, I know I'll always be learning.

I've read quite a few books, and I can't say any of them were bad books. I've learned something from each one. The two books that stand out most in my mind are Beekeeping for Dummies and Reverend Langstroth's book, Langstroth's Hive and the Honeybee. I'd never read a "for dummies" book and dislike the whole title idea, but I got it for next to nothing included in a purchase of several other books. I won't say it was the best; but it surprised me. For a beginner, it had a lot of good information and was fairly well organized. I'd also gotten a hard copy of Langstroth's Hive and the Honeybee, 4th edition published in 1878. I read into it some but found it a hard read. Then last winter, I found the audio book of the Langstroth's Hive and the Honeybee, burned it onto a CD and put it in the car. After a while, I got used to the reader being VERY dry and have listened to it twice. Langstroth's book is not a good book for beginners in that we now know so much about the bees that was unknown in Langstroth's time, the mid to late 1800's. For example, Langstroth thought some bees were born to be nurses and others were born to be foragers. However, I did appreciate his perspective on using sugar water to calm the bees instead of smoking them as well as his advice on keeping hives dry and well ventilated.

Mentoring is a great way to learn more. I've been mentoring a few new beekeepers; and even though I'm mostly teaching them, I'm also learning a lot from them. The questions they ask make me stop and think. I also learn from the mistakes they make. If you've been beekeeping more than a year or two, you can help someone just starting; and new Texas beekeepers do need mentors.

Beekeeping schools, seminars and conventions are a great place to learn about beekeeping. The Texas Beekeepers Association Annual Convention brings in speakers from across the country and is a wonderful opportunity to learn. This year, make the time and plan on attending. There is a lot of information on the TBA Annual Convention 2014 in this and the last *TBA Journal*. You can even register on line this year!

## INVOLVEMENT

Being involved with other beekeepers builds your knowledge and establishes a network with seasoned beekeepers who can help you with problems. The connections you make being involved can really pay off when you get in a bind or need some help. We had a new member come into Liberty County Beekeepers who jumped-in to help at one of our demos, and she was a big help getting displays set-up and providing refreshments. A week or so later when she had problems with her hives, she called me. I was more motivated to help because I knew who she was and remembered what a big help she had been at our Honey Harvest Day Demo.

Set aside time to attend a local, monthly beekeepers' meeting, but get involved. Don't be afraid to ask questions. The people I see getting the most out of meetings are those that get there early and listen in on what other beekeepers, just standing around, are talking about. I see many new beekeepers come to a meeting, sit down, get a little out of the program, and leave. Many of those stop coming after a couple months because they don't feel like they are learning enough for the time they invest in attending. Local beekeepers are your best source for information on what is happening in your area. Network with people so you have someone who can answer your questions and help you.

Keep in mind local beekeeping associations and clubs are non-profit groups, and they need help keeping the organization running. You don't have to be an expert in beekeeping to hold an office. You just need to be committed for the term of the office and committed to do the work of the position. Serving your local association is one of the best ways to connect with other beekeepers. Also, you do not need to hold an office to serve. Most beekeeping associations and clubs need volunteers throughout the year to help at events like, the Texas State Fair, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Boy Scout Fairs, and so on. Outreach volunteers are also needed to give programs at local schools, garden clubs, and civic groups like a local rotary club. Attend or help with any beekeeping schools or classes in your area. Last spring, a group about 50 miles away from my hometown was having a Beekeeping 101 class and needed people to set-up. I volunteered and got to stay for the class. Even though I thought I was past Beekeeping 101, I was still surprised by several little things I learned from the teacher.

Don't forget! The TBA Annual Conference 2014 will be held in Houston, November 7th through the 9th, and Remember: Beekeeping is about Making Choices.

Joyful Beekeeping,

Cameron Crane