

Sustainacycle's Sustainable Living Center  
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## Introduction to Urban Beekeeping

**Why:** Many people choose to keep bees for just as many reasons as there are beekeepers. A few of them are; increased pollination, to help the surrounding environment, increased harvest in gardens, orchards and on farms. Some also want to offset the losses of CCD (Colony Collapse Disorder.) As many as 40% of all bees were lost in the winter of 2015-2016, due to systemic pesticides and other factors that make up CCD.

Fact: 1 of 3 bites of food is directly attributed to honeybee activity!

**Who:** ALL of us can contribute to some degree!!!

**What:** Simple things like eliminating toxic chemical use around our homes and yards, providing habitat as encouraged by the NWF (National Wildlife Federation,) planting wildflowers and providing a water source all help the honeybee.

**When:** It is important to start immediately, as many areas are at extreme low population levels now! If losses were to continue at current rates, it could take decades to recover!!!

**Where:** Any outdoor area is a great spot to start. In the U.S., honeybees can be raised in all 50 states, *even Alaska!* Your yard, homestead, or even apartment balconies can support the dwindling honeybees. If you choose to have a hive(s,) always check local ordinances, laws and with homeowner associations. If they do not support raising bees, get interested people together and make that change!

**Hives:** We typically discuss 3 basic types of hives; Langstroth (traditional stacked boxes,) top bar or Kenyan 30 bar (lateral configuration without frames,) and pollinator /nuc (nucleus, including the queen, her attendants and some worker class bees – not intended for honey or wax production.)

## Frequently Asked Questions

- Are they Dangerous?  
There is always the possibility of a sting, but with the right training and personal protective equipment (PPE,) that hazard is greatly reduced. The *Therapik\** is always a good addition to your PPE. It reduces the reaction your body has to the bee venom by using infra-red heat to destroy the proteins in the venom. *Persons with known allergies to bees should consult their physicians.*
- What about the Africanized Killer Bees?  
Wild bees in Central Texas may eventually gain a certain degree of “*Africanization.*” Bee attitudes and genetics can be controlled with re-queening if they become more aggressive, or “*hotter.*”
- Are they Difficult to raise?  
Because bees are already “*programmed*” to do what they do, it is merely an investment of your time to learn to understand their behaviors and the obstacles that they face to make you a good steward of the colony. There are many books, videos and workshops to develop your skills. If you join a group, usually at the county level, or apprentice with a seasoned beekeeper, you will hone your craft very fast.
- Are they Expensive to keep?  
Your initial investment of a suit, gloves, veil, smoker, brush and hive tool along with your hive and a colony or package of bees ranges from approximately \$300-\$800, depending on the set-up you choose. Used equipment is available and D-I-Y beekeepers may choose to make their own. Keep in mind that this is a one-time investment that will pay dividends at least twice per year in the form of honey and wax.
- What do bees eat?  
As bees collect pollen and nectar, they consume some of it, but use the rest to make honey for winter stores. We responsibly harvest the excess that they make, as beekeepers, leaving them an amount equal to the amount of bees in the hive.
- What types of bees are used in hives?  
Typically the bees we use are of European or Italian descent and even an occasional Russian variety may be found in a hive or two.
- Can you use “*wild*” bees?  
A swarm of bees may be caught or captured, as well as bees from a cut-out can be used to start a nuc or new hive.

- What about the numbers?  
A queen may lay up to 1200 eggs per day after being bred and taking charge of a hive. Once she is bred, she will never breed again in her 3-4 year “*career*” or lifespan.
- What is a swarm?  
The short answer is, a swarm is a division of a colony, usually when food is plentiful and their numbers are doing well in the spring or late summer. The old queen will lay eggs in “*queen cells*” and leave with her entourage of attendants and workers. They will clump in a tree or structure while “*scouts*” look for a new home. They may take up to three days to do this. The old hive will hatch a new queen that will go out and be bred, then return to become the queen of the hive.

### **Fun Facts about Honeybees**

There are 3 kinds of bees in the hive. Queen, Drones (males,) and Workers.

Bees can fly at 15 mph, with bursts up to 20 mph.

Honeybees are the only insect that makes food for humans.

Bees can maintain a temperature of 92-93 degrees Fahrenheit in their central brood nest regardless of whether the outside temperature is 110 or -40 degrees.

It would take about 1 ounce of honey to fuel a honeybee's flight around the world.

To make one pound of honey, the bees in the colony must visit 2 million flowers, fly over 55,000 miles and will be the lifetime work of approximately 768 bees.

Honey is the ONLY food that includes all the substances necessary to sustain life, including water.

A single honeybee will only produce approximately 1/12 teaspoon of honey in her lifetime.

Honey has 52 different types of sugar in it!

\* <http://www.therapik.com/> Available at Sustainacycle, in the beekeeping section.