



South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Fact Sheet no. 1

First steps in keeping Bees.

Keeping bees can be a very enjoyable and rewarding hobby. Before starting you need to consider several very important factors. Just like all hobbies some people are better and more suitable than others when it comes to being a beekeeper. The most important consideration is safety, yours and that of others who may come in contact with your bees. Remember bees can and will sting occasionally so it's important that you take this into consideration. Firstly establish if you or any of your family has ever had an allergic reaction to a sting from any source be it an insect or plant. If so you should seek medical advice before you commence. Then you need to consider your neighbors. It's important that bees are not a nuisance to others. Remember you may view them as lovely little insects but others may have a great fear of bees. Before you choose a site for your bees read our fact sheet No. 2 "Apiary location – where can I keep my bees"

It is important that a general knowledge is obtained before starting. There are several options where by you can gain the necessary facts so that a well-informed opinion can be made. The following should be considered.

- Obtaining a good book(s)
- Befriend a beekeeper
- Join your local beekeeping association
- Attend beginner classes
- Attend practical demonstrations
- Complete exams
- Subscribe to beekeeping journal(s)
- Attend Gormanston summer course
- Internet

Obtain essential equipment

- Bee suit half of full
- Smoker
- Hive tool
- Gloves
- Wellingtons

It would be beneficial if a beginner could serve their time under an experienced beekeeper for at least a year. The amount of practical experience gain would be invaluable. A more informed opinion can then be reached as to whether or not beekeeping is a suitable hobby. A decision will then be needed as to where to keep the bees, the type of hive (See fact sheet no. 3 types of hives) and where to source your bees.

Bees can be obtained by:

- a nuclei
- a full colony
- swarm

It is always better for a beginner to start off with a nuclei (a baby hive), as they are easier to handle and the beginner can learn as they go along. Ideally a minimum of three colonies should be kept as soon as possible for comparison and if something goes wrong with one.

A nuclei or colony can be obtained at any time of the year except for about 3 months in the winter where as a swarm can only be obtained from May- July. The ideal approach would be to obtain an over wintered nuclei in April after learning the theory during the winter. This will allow the new beekeeper to see the nuclei expand (as they attend summer demos) and grow into a full colony reaping a surplus of honey. The second best way is to obtain a full colony but the beginner would need some hand on experience or better still personal tutorial from an experienced beekeeper. The least satisfactory is a swarm, unsure of when you would obtain one if ever, unknown temperament and disease risk.

Bee can be bought from:

- Recognised bee supplier
- A member of the local association
- From a friend for free

Purchasing from a recognised supplier gives some guarantee of quality as the supplier wants to keep their good name.

The age of the queen should be known and they should be disease free.

If bees are purchased from any other source it is essential to have the bees inspected by a competent beekeeper and samples taken for disease diagnosis.

Acquisition and sources of equipment.

Equipment can be obtained

- New from recognised equipment supplier
- Buying 2nd hand
- Make the equipment as DIY

Purchasing new equipment is the most expensive option but also the most reliable. It can be purchased from a catalogue or on the internet. Buy out of season and watch for discount bargains. There are several local producers of good quality equipment

If purchasing 2nd hand equipment always be aware that a very large proportion is rubbish and may be carrying diseases. It will be necessary to sterilise all such equipment before use. Avoid if possible, seek expert assistance if going down this route.

Constructing equipment at home can be very rewarding and educational. Some basic wood work equipment is necessary. A table saw/ router would be a great advantage but not totally necessary. Follow standard designs. Pay particular attention to the importance of bee space.

Starting beekeeping is an expensive hobby, so prospective beginner should gain some practical experience to see if they like to get involved and if allergic to stings

Spare equipment is necessary for swarm control etc. Talk to those who have bees and learn from their mistakes