



# beekeeping



## what is it?

The art and craft of keeping the honeybee *Apis mellifera*. Honey bees are highly social insects, living in extremely well-organised groups; each member has a specific job to do, and no bee can survive without the colony. Beekeepers provide hives for colonies of bees to live in. A hive will have one queen who lays eggs in the brood chambers. The drones' sole purpose in life is to fertilise the queen, and the rest are workers, who make the cells of the combs, clean them, fill them with pollen and honey, feed and tend to the young bee larvae, guard the hive and forage for nectar and pollen. The skill of the beekeeper is to maintain the colony at maximum strength while they are producing honey, and to prevent them from becoming overcrowded and swarming. Bees only need to be tended in spring and summer; from late autumn and throughout the winter they remain in a state of semi-hibernation. The beekeeper takes the surplus honey and in a good season a single hive can produce up to 80kg - plenty for a large family, with a surplus for local sale or barter. Bees are an excellent enterprise in an urban area, if you have a small garden, or even a rooftop space to site a hive. The bees will thrive on the abundant flowers in gardens and their flight path will be well above human heads. The art of beekeeping brings together people interested in improving agriculture, local economies, gardening, education, food and cooking, ancient craft skills and science.



*home-produced honey is cost-effective as well as healthy; you should cover the cost of equipment in the first year.*



*handling bees: as long as you use common sense in locating your hive(s) and wearing protective clothing, you and your neighbours will have no problems with bees.*

## what are the benefits?

80% of fruit tree pollination is by bees; they can also improve crop production and can travel up to 3 miles from the hive. Also, bee products can provide local, natural alternatives to many environmentally-damaging synthetic products. Bees can provide all the sugar we need, in the form of honey, without the need for costly and polluting transport and refining. Honey can be used as a sugar substitute in all cooking, including jam-making and brewing (wine or mead). Honey is a healthier option than refined sugar and beekeeping is said to be one of the healthiest professions.

Apitherapy is the use of bee products to treat ailments, boost the immune system and promote healthy tissue growth. Honey is also said to relieve stomach troubles and is a disinfectant in wound cleaning and healing. And of course hot honey and lemon is the sensible thing to take if you have cold symptoms. Apitherapy is just one of the natural ways to reduce our reliance on the pharmaceutical industry.

Beeswax has a myriad of uses: candles that burn longer than paraffin versions; rust prevention and a lubricant on screws and nails; it can be made into metal or wood polish; and it is a leather conditioner and waterproofer.



Soaps and cosmetics can be made using bee products, - rich in minerals and vitamins, and with antibiotic properties.

All honey and wax products can be obtained locally from small-scale producers.

## what can I do?

Beekeeping is an extremely cost-effective hobby. It's possible to buy all the equipment you need to start off (with one hive) for around £200. If you consider that you can produce up to 80kg from one hive in a good year, then you will start making a profit from year two. You can save money by getting your equipment at auction (a typical price for a brood chamber plus a colony is c. £50). the BBKA News (see resources) and 'BeeCraft' magazine contain dates and locations of auctions.

You need to know what you're doing though. LILI run a useful introductory course, where you will handle bees and get the basic information to decide if it's for you. It's also a good idea to read as much as you can, and join your local beekeeping association, where you'll meet enthusiastic beekeepers happy to share their skills and knowledge with beginners. Many run

longer courses, as well as summer apiary meetings, honey shows and winter lectures, and for a £5 annual subscription, you can get 10% discount on equipment, insurance to cover loss of bees and damage to kit, and be able to share more expensive equipment such as extractors. Ask someone who lives locally if you can join them on some of their hive visits and start handling bees under supervision.

You don't need to register anywhere to keep bees, and as long as you apply common sense in locating your hive(s), you won't cause a nuisance to neighbours. When you're not extracting honey, bees just need checking every 10 days; in other words, they do most of the work.

If bee-keeping really isn't the thing for you, there is still plenty you can do to support local beekeepers: buy honey locally, as well as other bee products such as candles, furniture polish, soaps, cosmetics and herbal remedies; you could even learn to make them yourself.

## resources

- See LILI's website for beekeeping courses all over the UK, plus books and more info
- British Beekeepers Association - 02476 696679 - [bbka.org.uk](http://bbka.org.uk) online guide to getting started; details of local BKAs; monthly newsletter - BBKA News
- International Bee Research Association [ibra.org.uk](http://ibra.org.uk) - research to increase the awareness of the role of bees in the environment; quarterly journal - 'Bee World'
- [csl.gov.uk/science/organ/envIRON/bee](http://csl.gov.uk/science/organ/envIRON/bee) National Beekeeping Unit – research, advice, inspections 01904 462000
- Ted Hooper, 1977 , *Guide to Bees and Honey*, Rodale Press (the beekeepers bible)
- Clive de Bruyn, 1997, *Practical Beekeeping*, The Crowood Press
- there are numerous local shows as well as the annual Honey Show and Spring Convention (enquire at BBKA)



*beehives can be bought cheaply at auction; dates and locations of auctions appear in the 'Bee Craft' newsletter (see 'resources').*

Contact us or visit our website to find out more about our message, networks, factsheets, books, courses, products, services, magazines, links, forum, events and volunteering on organic farms. You can also become a Friend of LILI, receive our e-newsletter, and help us change the world.

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