

A person wearing a white protective beekeeping suit and a green hat is standing in a yard. They are holding a wooden frame, likely a hive component. In the background, there are several yellow beehives on stands. The yard is filled with dry grass and some trees without leaves. A house is visible in the distance. The overall scene is dimly lit, suggesting an overcast day.

Beginner Beekeeping – Week 1

Getting ready to start

To-do list:

- January

- Reserve nucleus colonies
- Order hive parts to assemble

- February

- Reserve package bees
- Order hive parts, tools and equipment

- March

- Order assembled hive parts
- [Join your county beekeeping club](#)

To-do list:

April, May, and June (in a nutshell):

- Monitoring and aiding the growth of the hive

*Bees build
comb on
foundation*



They use the comb for storage
of brood (babies) and food

Opening the Hive

To-do list:

June, July, August:

- What am I doing here?
 - CONTROLLING VARROA MITES
- How often should I get in?
 - About every week
- What can go wrong?
 - (that's why this is a 10-hour class)
- Am I going to get stung?
 - Yup.



To-do list (in a nutshell)

September, October,
November:

- Pulling honey supers
- Treating for Varroa mites*
- Preparing for winter



- Am I going to get any honey?

***If you learn only one thing from this class,
learn about Varroa mites!**

To-do list:

December, January

- Learning...
- and waiting...

For the coming Spring, when the
cycle starts again



Hive Parts

- Wooden Frame with Wired Wax Foundation

- *Bees don't like plastic*

(Write the year on the top of new frames with a sharpie)



Hive Parts

- Hive Stand with Landing Board



Hive Parts

- Screened Bottom Board with Mite Tray



Hive Parts

- Slatted Rack
 - (optional)
- Entrance Reducer below



[see: How to assemble hive bodies and supers](#)

Hive Parts

- Deep Hive Body



Hive Parts

- Second Deep Hive Body



Hive Parts

- Medium Super



Hive Parts

- Inner Cover



Hive Parts

Inner Cover



Hive Parts

-
- Telescoping Cover





Hive Parts

-
- “English Garden” Copper Cover
 - Hive Ratchet Strap

Hive Parts

Hive Stand

* We strongly recommend
you start with two hives



Decision Time:

- 8 Frame vs 10 Frame





Decision Time:

- Deep or Medium Hive Bodies
- Medium or Shallow Supers
- (Your textbook recommends all 8 frame mediums)

see: [Painting your hive parts](#)

Coat your hive parts
with exterior grade
latex paint or sealer

- Dark colors are best
for the Maine
climate



Essential Tools:

Hive tool



Essential Tools:

- 4x7" Smoker

(Smoker fuel is around you everywhere.)



Essential Tools:

- Smoker
 - It calms bees and makes your hobby more enjoyable
 - It doesn't hurt the bees
 - Just use it, but sparingly
 - Masks the bees' alarm pheromone



Essential Tools:

Jacket with Veil

(Get to know Meghan.
She's a very good
beekeeper.)



Essential Tools:

Queen Excluder

(But I won't let you buy one until next year.)



Packages vs. Nucs

- Advantages of packages
 - Readily available
 - Easy to install
 - Slow build up provides more gradual learning curve for beginners
- Disadvantages of packages
 - Where did my bees come from?
 - Must be installed right away
 - Possibility of queen failure
 - Slow build-up, lower odds of 1st year honey harvest

Packages vs. Nucs

- Advantages of nucs
 - Accepted queen
 - Established colony
 - Faster build-up
- Disadvantages of nucs
 - You're a real beekeeper on Day One
 - Faster build-up



Best of both worlds:

- Start with a package, then a nuc
 - Early start, slightly lower cost
 - Time to get used to being around bees and watch them build out a hive before your nuc arrives
 - Resources from the nuc hive can solve mid-season problems and give the package bees a boost.

- Requeen Italian packages
 - Italians build comb well
 - Get a northern-bred queen established in the hive in time to survive the winter
 - Erin Forbes and C. Bee compared success rates and found a nearly 3x better survival for requeened packages



see: [Erin installs a package](#)

Use better bees: (the right bees for your climate)

Characteristic	Russian	Carniolan	Italian	Notes
Wintering Ability	Best	Moderate	Poorest	
Winter Honey Consumption	Need Least	Moderate	Need Most	
Spring Buildup	Latest	Moderate	Earliest	
Speed of Buildup	Fastest	Moderate	Slowest	Russians start their buildup very late, but the buildup is explosive once it happens. They linger until both honey and pollen are available. Do not be lulled into complacency and be left unprepared!
Swarming	Strongest Impulse	Moderate	Weakest Impulse	You can sometimes get away with crowding Italians. Russians and Carniolans will readily swarm if crowded or honey bound. With both Russians and Carniolans you must consider supering earlier in their development (percentage of open comb). Along with this, super more generously if possible. Super even earlier with Russians, as their growth can be the most explosive. Swarming is not a problem with Russians or Carniolans if you know what to expect and you manage your colonies. Swarming is negligible in our outfit.
Populations Throughout Year	Least Bees	Moderate	Most Bees	
Tracheal Mite Resistance	Most Resistant	Moderate	Least Resistant	Russian bees are, by far, the most resistant to HTM. Some mites have been present in a few of my samples but they have not been a threat either biologically or economically in my Russian colonies. Russians require no treatment for HTM. Italians and Carniolans are both improving in this area. Some highly selected Italians and Carniolans are very resistant.
Varroa Mite Resistance	Most Resistant	Moderate	Least Resistance	If you are operating only pure Russian bees in the North, you will not need to treat every year for varroa mites. We have not treated for mites since 2005 or 2006. Certainly a southern operation experiences more varroa pressure than my northern outfit. If you run mixed apiaries or Russian hybrids you will need to treat, though my experience indicates that you can extend the period between treatments. In all cases, the amount of varroa pressure from outside sources must be taken into consideration.

Sources of Supply

- Local vs. catalog
 - We're not fans of all-inclusive "Beginner Kits"
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Bees: Packages

Russian

- The Honey Exchange

Italian

- [Check out the Maine State Beekeeper's website](#)

Nucleus Colonies

- Buzz Cooper, Windham, ME
- Maya's Apiary, Sydney, ME
- Sparky's Honey & Maple, Hope, ME
- Swan's Honey, Albion, ME
- Bob Egan, Skowhegan, ME
- Merrimack Valley, MA

Next Week:

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-
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Neighbor Management

Finding the right spot for your hive

Getting started with some bees!