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GUIDE

for new beekeepers



GETTING STARTED

the right way

There are a few things you need to know before you commit to purchasing your very first beehive. Some recommendations are entirely voluntary, whilst others are obligations you are required to meet under New Zealand law.

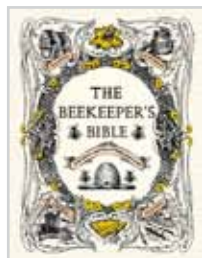
We've summarised the basics for you to consider:

1. READ UP!

There are a number of fantastic books available to help you navigate your way along your beekeeping journey. Here are some of our faves:



Practical Beekeeping
in New Zealand



The Beekeeper's
Bible



Beekeeping for
Dummies



Honey - Nature's
Golden Healer

If you prefer to learn through observation, we recommend watching various YouTube videos, those by 'The Fat Bee Man' are particularly educational and insightful.

2. GET SOME FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE!

If, after reading or watching videos, you decide that keeping bees is definitely something you'd like to pursue, you may wish to visit or join your local beekeeping club. This will provide you with experience tending bees, and ongoing support and advice if you do go ahead with purchasing a hive. Working with a large colony can be quite daunting (sometimes terrifying) for newbies, so it may be best to work out whether it's something you're comfortable with, before you invest in equipment and bees!

3. SUIT UP!

It's inevitable that at some stage you will get stung. But in order to minimise this, it's important to invest in good quality protective gear. As a minimum you'll require a half suit (full is better) with a veil, plus a pair of leather gloves. Other equipment you'll need is a sturdy hive tool (we recommend the J-hook versions) and a smoker. There are a number of online beekeeping supply companies including Ecrotek and Ceracell. TradeMe is also a good source, as is your local Farmlands store.



4. SET UP YOUR APIARY SITE

Have you thought about where you are going to put your hive(s)? And have you checked whether your district council has any restrictions on the keeping of bees? You may need a permit, so its always best to refer to your council website for information. Do you have pets or small children that may be affected by the bees' flight path? Or are there neighbours in close proximity that you need to be considerate of? (Bee poo and dropped pollen can be difficult to remove from nice clean washing hanging on the line!)

TIP: Erecting a screen or high fence a foot or so from the hive entrance will force the bees to fly up and over it, reducing any potential nuisance.

Ensure that your bees will be in a sunny, sheltered position. Some beekeepers recommend that hives face north, but we have found this not to be necessary, so don't worry too much.

5. BUY YOUR HIVE (OR BETTER YET, BUY TWO!)

While many first-time beekeepers prefer to keep just the one hive, there are a number of benefits associated with keeping two hives on your apiary site. If one hive starts to show signs of weakness or you find out that it's queenless, the second hive can be merged with the first, or its resources can be utilised in the weaker/queenless hive to build it back up or create a new queen.

We recommend buying your hive in late Spring or Summer (Autumn at a stretch), when the honey flow is on and the colony will be relatively self-sufficient. This gives the bees the best opportunity to thrive in their new home.

You generally have two options when it comes to purchasing your hive, a NUC or a full hive.

NUC (nucleus)

This is a good value option if you're not concerned with honey gathering immediately. When purchased in Spring/Summer to coincide with a strong honey flow, a NUC hive can quickly grow to a 10-frame hive over 3-4 weeks. However you will need to buy additional equipment as the only inclusions with a NUC are:

- 4 or 5x Full-depth frames (including brood & food)
- 1x Queen bee
- 1x Bee colony

The frames will need to be introduced into a full depth brood box with the required additional frames to make up the full 10 (either wooden with wax foundation or waxed plastic frames - see over page). You'll also need the additional equipment listed in the full 10-frame hive inclusions.

10-frame Hive

This is a ready-to-go hive, and when purchased in Spring/Summer and combined with a strong honey flow, it will be ready for a honey box to be positioned on top immediately. If you're keen to maximise your honey gathering opportunity for the season, this is your best option! And it also saves you the added hassle of buying/building the additional equipment not provided with the NUC.



Your 10-frame hive should include:

- 1x Galvanised metal hive lid/roof
- 1x Hive mat
- 10x Full-depth frames, including brood, food & laying space
(check that there are indeed 10 frames - don't accept any less)
- 1x Full-depth untreated pine brood box
- 1x Base/floor
- 1x Queen bee
- 1x Bee colony

All woodware should be untreated (as treated wood is toxic to bees) and brood/honey boxes should be painted (on the outside only) or paraffin dipped to protect from the elements. Ceracell also sell a range of bee-friendly wood preservation products.

Ensure your brood box and brood frames are full-depth. 3/4 depth frames and boxes are not really ideal for the brood chamber as they can fill up too quickly, but are fine for honey.

If you feel confident, inspect the hive checking for a queen (which may or may not be marked - many commercial beekeepers running 100's or 1000's of hives, simply do not have the means/time to mark every single queen they produce), freshly laid eggs, larvae, capped brood and food stores. If you're not confident doing this, ask a local beekeeper to help (this is where your local beekeeping club can come in handy) or insist the seller show you.

Check that all the equipment is in good order. You won't be able to insist that everything is brand spanking new, but it shouldn't look like it's about to fall apart! Ensure that the seller holds a DECA (Disease Elimination Conformity Agreement) or has had the hive recently inspected by someone who does.

ADDITIONAL HIVE WARE:

- You will need a queen excluder to keep the queen in the brood chamber and prevent her from laying her eggs in the honey box.
- We recommend ensuring that you have at least 2x honey boxes on hand (full depth or 3/4, it's up to you).
- You will need 10 frames per honey box - wooden with wax sheet foundation, or plastic (again, up to you). Wooden frames are great if you enjoy eating comb honey and plastic frames hold up well through the honey extraction process (if you plan on going down that track). You may even like to use a mixture of both. However if you are using plastic frames we recommend covering each side of the frame in a good coating of melted beeswax prior to use. This encourages the bees to build comb on them faster. A small paint roller (not foam) is ideal for this. Or you can purchase slightly more expensive pre-waxed frames to save you time.



Pre-waxed plastic frames;
full & 3/4 depth
Image source: Ecrotrek



Full-depth wooden frame
with wax foundation.
Image source: Ceracell



6. REGISTER YOURSELF AS A BEEKEEPER AND REGISTER YOUR APIARY SITE

A national database of beekeepers and apiary sites (where hives are located) is maintained byASUREQuality. This is legally required in accordance with the Biosecurity (National American Foulbrood Pest Management Strategy) Order 1998. Whilst there is no fee to register hives, there is an AFB Biosecurity Levy payable each year. This is based on the number of apiaries and hives held by you, the beekeeper. You can register as a new beekeeper and register a new apiary site by going to: www.afb.org.nz. The form is the same for each process. Once you're a registered beekeeper and wish to register a new apiary site, simply select 'existing beekeeper', enter in the apiarist number allocated to you and the details of the apiary site.

7. KEEP ON TOP OF YOUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the above, you are required to complete an Annual Disease Return (ADR). PLUS there is also a separate yearly Certificate of Inspection (COI) showing that each hive was inspected for AFB by an approved DECA holder. You can get an exemption for this if you attend and pass an AFB recognition competency course/test. Refer to www.afb.org.nz for dates when the course is available in your area. It's also recommended to purchase a book entitled 'Elimination of American Foulbrood Disease without the use of Drugs – By Dr Mark Goodwin'. This is available from www.apinz.org.nz. Which also has a number of other beekeeping resources available.

8. ENSURE YOU ARE UP-TO-DATE ON VARROA MITE CONTROL PRACTICES

Varroa mite is here, and here with vengeance. A bad infestation can mean the death of a hive. Whilst there are some natural ways of controlling mite levels, many beekeepers opt for organic and/or non-organic treatments to reduce varroa mite infestations. It's important to rotate your treatments and treat at the correct time of year. Some treatments can be used with honey boxes on, some can't. A handy and comprehensive guide to varroa management can be found [here](#).

Whilst some hobby beekeepers, who are only running a small number of hives, are going down the route of treatment-free or low treatment beekeeping, we caution this practice if you are a beginner, and encourage you to get some experience under your belt first, before exploring these alternatives.

9. BE AWARE OF TUTIN AND TOXIC HONEY CAUSED BY THE PASSION VINE HOPPER

Honey harvested before the end of December is considered low risk of Tutin poisoning. However get to know your local area, talk to local beekeepers and if ever in doubt, get your honey tested. Tutin poisoning can be fatal! Better to be safe than sorry if consuming your own honey, however if you intend to sell or trade your honey, then you are required by law to get it tested.





"Caring for bees may seem fairly daunting to someone just starting out. But I can assure you that it can also be an extremely rewarding, relaxing, and highly enjoyable (not to mention delicious!) hobby, which will quickly turn into a passion. I wish you every success and look forward to providing you with happy, healthy and productive bees"

Derrick Barber - Owner / Managing Director (and passionate bee enthusiast)
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