



CENTRAL JERSEY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION BEEKEEPING TIPS

This document has been produced using experience gained with years of backyard beekeeping. This document is targeted towards the newer backyard beekeepers. Some of the suggestions will not be appropriate for larger scale beekeepers because they are too time consuming. But a backyard beekeeper often has a different set of goals when they work their bees. A large scale beekeeper wants to perform a minimum amount of work to maximize his/her time and profit. A backyard beekeeper often keeps bees as a hobby that is enjoyable and produces a tasty crop and helps the environment. The backyard beekeeper often enjoys a journey through each hive to see what is going on inside. They will often work slower and worry more about crushing a few bees.



But, at the same time, don't be afraid to explore the contents of the hive. There is no better way to learn how to manage bees than through keen observation and experience gained working the hives. Will the hive be a little less productive because you disturbed it? Possibly, but you will replace that with personal satisfaction and enjoyment. As time passes and you gain experience, you will naturally spend less time going through each hive and you will learn how to maximize your actions to keep your hives healthy and productive.

Central Jersey Beekeepers has put together a number of tips that may help you in your early beekeeping careers. Above all, practice safe beekeeping methods that protect you and anyone around you. Always remember that beekeeping can be a dangerous activity if not approached with caution and appropriate methods and equipment.

FIND A MENTOR:

Beekeeping is not as easy as it once was. With the introduction of many parasites and other pathogens, beekeeping in the USA is much more difficult than it was 20 years ago. A mentor can help with the initial challenges of beekeeping. Many have been successful on their own but many others have spent years trying to learn the craft alone only to lose and replace their bees year after year. Save yourself the effort and expense and ask for a mentor at your next CJBA meeting to help you find a suitable mentor.



EDUCATE YOURSELF:

Read books, magazines, attend meetings, and network.

BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR:

Follow the best practices defined for NJ. Best practices documents can be found on the web at www.state.nj.us/agriculture/divisions/pi/pdf/beeguidelines.pdf. The document defines the maximum number of hives on a lot and how to position the hives to reduce negative interaction with your neighbors.

INSPECTIONS:

Have a plan detailing what you expect to accomplish before opening each hive. Observe activity at the entrance before opening the hive. Much can be determined concerning the health of a colony just by watching what the bees are doing and what they are bringing home from foraging. A good rule is to keep a journal. Refer to your journal to make sure you accomplish all of your goals in an efficient manner that disrupts the hive as little as possible.

KEEP A DETAILED JOURNAL FOR EACH HIVE:

What did you do and when? If you tried something new- were you successful? Observations: laying queen, eggs and brood of all stages, pollen/honey stores, adequate space, mite/beetle damage, disease. Note dates of important hive events: swarming, new laying queen, etc. Things that need to be done during future visits: more supers, feeding, watch for new queen to start laying, etc. How much honey did the hive produce? When did various nectar crops start blooming and how did that affect hive operations? For example, did the start of black locust bloom start the primary honey flow and end swarming? Was the start of fruit bloom a good time to remove entrance reducers and add a super or two? Use this information in subsequent years to help with hive maintenance.

SWARM PREVENTION:

Always try to prevent swarms. Swarms scare neighbors and reduce the honey crop by as much as 2 medium supers or more.

If queen excluders are used, add supers directly above queen excluder. The bees will sense the extra space and delay swarm preparation in most cases. After swarm season, supers can be added to the top if necessary. If supers are full of bees and the hive is crowded, more supers can be added. Bees will store more honey if they have adequate area to evaporate the nectar. Supering is half science and half art. You will develop a feel for it as you gain experience. Swarm season will draw to a close when the main flow is on and the weather gets hot. Weekly, tip up the top brood chamber and look for queen cups, eggs in queen cups, or queen cells. If you find capped queen cells, do not immediately start to cut them.



Make sure you still have a queen first. They may have already swarmed. You can often tell if you note how many bees are working the supers compared to your previous weekly inspection.

AFTER A SWARM:

As closely as possible, note the swarm date in your records. Watch for eggs and brood in the hive in approximately a month. Be careful not to destroy all of the queen cells if the hive has swarmed.

GENERAL HIVE HEALTH:

Keep the varroa mite population under control as much as possible. Perform a full brood area inspection at least 2 times a year. Look carefully for brood diseases, especially American Foul Brood.

WINTERING:

Reduce hive entrances before mice move in. Make sure to treat for Varroa early so that you have a strong healthy winter cluster. Make sure you have 60 pounds of honey to overwinter on. I have never had to worry about pollen, they always seem to have enough. Make sure there is a way for air to escape at the top of the hive.



This document was prepared by Leonard Klinker, Geff Vitale, Edmund Kosenski and edited by Laura Petrovich-Cheney.

For more information and a more detailed version of this document, please visit www.cjba.org.

CJBA recommends that you attend our General Membership Meetings, attend our Hive Workshops (a hands-on demonstration of beekeeping), and visit our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Central-Jersey-Beekeepers-Association> to maintain good beekeeping practices.