

Community IPM

Bee a Good Neighbor—Information for beekeepers and neighbors

J. Gangloff-Kaufmann, New York State Integrated Pest Management Program, Cornell University

A little praise for the honey bee is in order. These delightful insects are both valuable and interesting for a variety of reasons. Honey bees are domesticated throughout the world as producers of honey and for pollination of food crops, such as tree fruits, vegetables and berries. Bees are responsible for pollinating about 30% of the food crops consumed by humans. Honey bees have been cultivated by people since ancient times and beekeeping has become an increasingly popular hobby in the United States. There are thousands of hobby and professional beekeepers in New York State alone. Honey bees are beneficial insects with fascinating social lives that include cooperation, division of labor, and complex communication. All in all, the honey bee is a remarkable creature worthy of respect.

Beekeepers abound

In most rural areas of New York State, commercial beekeepers are an integral part of farming and food production. Keepers may tend to dozens or hundreds of hives, which are transported to growers' fields for pollination services. However, backyard and hobbyist beekeepers manage hives in all areas of New York, including New York City.

Backyard beekeepers tend to have only one or a few hives—so the hives often go unnoticed. They enjoy this hobby because they love honey bees; take pleasure in producing, using or selling honey; or take interest in gardening or sustainability. Backyard beekeeping is legal in most parts of New York State. Beekeepers are encouraged to practice responsible management to ensure good neighbor relations and the safety of both people and bees. After all, honey bees can sting if threatened.

Although beneficial, honey bees should be managed in a responsible way. Best management practices that beekeepers follow include:

Education—Most beekeepers, especially experienced ones, are very knowledgeable about keeping bees. Novice beekeepers are encouraged to join clubs and groups that provide access to Master Beekeepers and their knowledge and experience. Courses are available and accessible to most New Yorkers interested in keeping bees. Email lists and web-based resources inform beekeepers of recommended changes in beekeeping practices and updates about pests and diseases of bees.

Hive management and feeding—A well maintained hive will be docile and gentle. Honey bees need to be fed at certain times of the year when flowers are scarce, and they always need a source of fresh water. Beekeepers provide sugar-water as sustenance and fresh water to drink in order to avoid honey bees visiting neighbors' pools, fountains or other water containers. Maintaining health of the colony involves protecting bees from pests and disease, as well as minimizing the impact of environmental conditions on the hive. Also, by



limiting activity such as the use of lawn mowers and trimmers around hives, a beekeeper can keep the colony from becoming defensive.

Hive density—Backyard beekeepers are encouraged to follow guidelines that limit the number of hives per acre in suburban and urban neighborhoods. No more than two hives should be kept on lots of one quarter of an acre of land or less. Higher hive densities may lead to slow colony growth, low honey production, and defensive behavior of bees due to the lack of available resources.

Being considerate—Hives should be placed as far away from the yard perimeter as possible, and in such a way as to reduce flight pathways through neighboring yards. It is also good policy for beekeepers to work with the hive when neighbors are not around. Weather conditions greatly affect the disposition of the hive, so working on sunny warm days is preferable. Wood smoke is used to calm the bees. The likelihood of a swarm can be reduced by good management.

If you live near beehives:

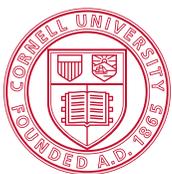
First of all don't panic—Honey bees are not aggressive in the way that yellowjackets are. Swarms are quite docile-though interfering with a swarm is not recommended. If you see a swarm, leave it be. Africanized honey bees, a particularly aggressive strain of honey bees, are not present in New York.

Use pesticides sparingly—All flowering plants, including trees and shrubs, are visited by honey bees and benefit from their foraging. Use pesticide sprays only when necessary and preferably close to dusk to minimize their lethal effects on honey bees and other beneficials. Even granular pesticides can be harmful because they can be picked up by foraging bees along with pollen and brought to the hive.

Discourage bees in the lawn—Lawns with white clover flowers will be attractive to all bees, so it is recommended that the homeowner mow when clover flowers bloom to minimize bee foraging in the lawn. Also, clover can grow better than grass in low nitrogen low pH (acidic) soil, and maintained at low mowing heights. Therefore, adding nitrogen, raising the mowing height and possible raising the pH will help grass to outcompete clover.

Remember—Do not be alarmed if you smell wood smoke, as it is a primary tool for calming and working with honey bees. Understand that honey bees are generally docile away from the hive and wherever gardens are planted. Bees offer a service of pollination that helps provide the food we eat.

Cooperation benefits us all—Beekeeping is an art and a science. It can be challenging to protect bees from diseases and pests, such as fungi, bacteria, and mites. Many beekeepers have lost half or more of their hives as a result of the mysterious colony collapse disorder. Maintaining healthy hives has never been more important. Understanding and cooperation among neighbors can make beekeeping much easier and beneficial for all.



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