

Getting Started with Bees

by Buddy Marterre

Equipment:

- ❖ Hive stand, built level, preferably facing South / East, with lots of sun and a windbreak at the back:
 - 8) Cinder blocks
 - 2) 4 x 4s, at least 6 feet long
- ❖ 2 hives*, EACH with:
 - Screened bottom board, inner cover, top, feeder, and entrance reducer (ALL 8 or 10 frame)
 - Brood chambers (assembled or unassembled – also either ONLY 8 or 10 frame)
 - 2 deep (9 1/2" hive bodies) OR 3 mediums (6 5/8" deep - *inappropriately* called supers when they are used for brood – although they are the same piece of equipment)
 - Appropriate depth frames (deep or medium) and EITHER reinforcement wire and thin surplus foundation (which you will cut) for no-foundation frames OR wire-reinforced wax foundation (and 1 drone frame per brood chamber)
 - Honey super (optional your first year - assembled or unassembled – either 8 or 10 frame)
 - Either medium (6 5/8") or shallow (5 11/16")
 - Appropriate depth frames and wax-coated plastic foundation
 - Queen excluder (optional your first year - plastic or metal)
- ❖ Bee suit (inspector jacket) or veil, gloves, and painter's pants or (white) jeans
- ❖ Hive tool and a (good, large) smoker (bee brush is optional), and glasses (to see eggs with)
- ❖ Smoker fuel (cedar chips from pet store), and lighter
- ❖ Wood glue (TiteBond II or III), nails, primer, exterior paint, ventilation blocks (1/2" thick), and bricks

* It is MUCH better to start with two hives than one. If you have a problem with one hive you can use the strong one to 'rescue' the weaker one. It also gives you something to compare to, so that you will recognize a problem much quicker than you otherwise would.

* Your first decision is hive width. If you plan on expanding your operation much beyond 5 hives, or plan to incorporate used equipment, I suggest the traditional 10 frame hive width. Bees would rather expand upwards than outwards, however, so if you plan to only have a few hives and only use new equipment, many new beekeepers chose the 8 frame width. Also, a 10 frame medium super full of honey weighs 55 pounds (and it may be over 5 feet off the ground!), so many smaller beekeepers chose the 8 frame width. ALL the equipment (bottom boards, brood chambers, honey supers, queen excluders, inner covers, tops, and top feeders) in your operation needs to be the same width!

* Brood chamber depth is your next decision. Traditionally, 2 deep brood chambers have been used in our area, but many new beekeepers now use 3 mediums, as well as medium honey supers. That way all the equipment (particularly the frames and foundation) are the same depth, which greatly facilitates exchanges within and between colonies. The honeycomb of a medium depth frame is exactly 2/3 the depth of deep foundation. And the bare minimum, the depth of brood chambers for successful over-wintering is one deep and one medium; two mediums are inadequate!

* Next decide your foundation type. Bees draw comb on wax foundation easier than plastic, but extractors may cause the wax to break. Therefore I prefer wax-coated plastic foundation for frames in honey supers and I prefer wire-reinforced wax foundation or no-foundation for brood frames. Then calculate how many frames and pieces of foundation of each size you need (example: 32 medium depth frames and foundation for each 8 frame triple medium hive with one medium honey super).

If you need to save money, consider obtaining used brood chambers, inner covers, tops, feeders, a hive tool and a smoker. Commercial quality woodenware (with knots, but no holes or cracks) is fine and is usually cheaper. If you obtain used woodenware, it MUST be treated to prevent AFB spores. The interior surfaces must be thoroughly scraped (with a wire brush or paint scraper), AND either scorched with a propane flame, scrubbed with dilute bleach (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) or ethylene oxide-fumigated (by contacting our local NC Apiary inspector). Wood workers can make their own brood chambers, honey supers, feeders, inner covers, and tops (bottom boards are difficult but not impossible to make). Don't purchase used frames as they may harbor disease. Purchase new screened bottom boards, frames, wire (for no-foundation frames), and plastic gloves. No honey super or queen excluder is needed your first year and a bee brush is unnecessary. A veil and long sleeved white shirt can be used instead of an inspector jacket. You may also consider buying only one hive that you share with another beekeeper who has a second hive. But whatever you do, DON'T scrimp on queens or bees!