

Best-practice guidelines for nuisance-free beekeeping

You are excited to become a beekeeper. You've read the books. You watched the videos. The thought of keeping bees in your backyard, pollinating, gathering nectar and then sharing the honey with family and friends makes it hard not to be excited.

But, do your neighbours share that same excitement?

City Bylaws and Legal Obligations

Although the City of Regina's bylaws do not prohibit the keeping of honey bees within the city's limits, they do hear the complaints from residents stating their backyard enjoyment is being disrupted by neighbouring honey bees.

Because of the proximity of neighbours in cities and towns, beekeepers must take extra steps to ensure their bees do not become a nuisance. Keeping bees properly should allow your neighbours to continue to feel safe and comfortable within their own yards.

By law, (see Saskatchewan's *The Apiaries Act*) you must register your bees with the Provincial Apiculturist. Create an account in the Saskatchewan Premises Identification System (PID) to register your bees and hive locations. The Provincial Apiculturist will access your information there.

[Saskatchewan Premises Identification System](#)

[The Apiaries Act 2005](#)

Communication

Being an urban beekeeper can bring great benefits to your neighbourhood. For example, fruit trees and vegetables will become more bountiful. Before purchasing your first bee colony and investing all that money in beekeeping equipment, talk to your neighbours. Let them know you are wanting to keep bees (one or two hives only) and that you are going to do everything necessary to ensure they don't become a problem.

Bee stings are usually the neighbors' biggest concern. Heck, even beekeepers don't like being stung. Just knowing you are a beekeeper, you and your bees may become the reason behind all insect stings, including wasps.

As well, your neighbours will inform you if there are allergies. Knowing you have beehives, consisting of thousands of bees compressed into one hive, increases their fear of being stung.

Continue to talk with your neighbours. Try to capture their interest and cooperation. As you learn, share that knowledge with them and you will soon find they will become as invested in your bees as you are.

And the promise of receiving fresh honey each summer will sweeten the deal.

Get Educated. Take Training.

Before jumping in, take training. A couple hundred dollars spent on a beekeeping course will pay for itself by helping you keep just one hive alive. Or, it could save you thousands of dollars when you may realize maybe beekeeping isn't for you.

There are a couple local organizations that offer spring beekeeping courses. Read books. Watch videos. Get involved with your local bee club.

Frequently check the Regina Bee Club's Event Calendar for upcoming classes.

Hive Placement and Barriers

Where you place your hive and how you control their flight path is important. Your goal is to direct the bees arriving to the beehive up to fly up, over and away from where people and pets congregate (backyards, walking paths). Hives that are hidden from view are less likely to be noticed (out of sight, out of mind).

In order to ensure the appropriate height of a honeybee flight path, a beehive should be situated behind a barrier (fence, building, hedge) that is 1.8m (6 ft) in height running parallel to the property line. If a 1.8m (6 ft) barrier is not present, place the hive at least 2.4m (8 ft) off the ground which makes it more difficult to work in Saskatchewan.

Water

One of the biggest complaints (and rightfully so) are bees using the neighbouring swimming pools, bird baths or dog dishes for their water source. Bees covering dripping pool pumps, water faucets, or seeing drowned bees in a bird bath does not make for happy neighbours.

Water serves a couple of uses in a colony. It is used to cool the hive and to thin stored honey.

A water source needs to be available as early in the spring as possible so that they can orientate to that source quickly. Keeping it full is equally important or they will seek other sources. Once they find a new water source, it is difficult to bring them back.

Swarms

Urban beekeepers need to pay especially close attention to bees and their desire to swarm.

Thousands of bees taking to the air along with the sound that is emitted or finding a post-swarm cluster can be very scary.

There are many steps that you can take to prevent swarming. See "Residential Beekeeping: Best-practice Guidelines for Nuisance-free Beekeeping in Oregon" for additional information. Link is below.

- Check your hives regularly for queen cells and congestion.
- Replace an aging queen every two years.
- Make sure you are providing your bees room to grow.

Yellow Rain

After a long winter of being inside the hive, bees will take the first opportunity to go on a cleansing flight. The yellow specks of faeces that they leave behind wash off hard surfaces easily

enough, but laundry drying on the line will require rewashing. If you are under their early spring flight path, you might be the recipient of one of their yellow “droppings”.

Defensive or Agitated Behaviour

It is in a honey bee's nature to defend its hive. They'll defend their hive when their honey is being taken or when something like a skunk is picking them off for an easy meal. Changes in barometric pressure (incoming rain or humidity) can make bees more sting-y. Hives disturbed by bangs, roughness or vibration can become agitated. Queenless hives will experience a mood shift. And sometimes it is just in that queen's DNA to produce defensive (or aggressive) bees. Action will have to be taken to eliminate the disturbance or replace the queen. Work the bees on sunny days, don't work them when they are clearly not in the mood to be worked (they'll let you know) and don't work them when there is more activity than normal in neighbouring back yards (ie family gatherings). You may not be getting stung, but others could be.

Commitment

Keeping honey bees is more than turning a tap and watching the honey flow. The commitment is huge in time and money and is no different than keeping any other form of livestock. If you are not home to tend to their needs, like adding supers during a honey flow, find a beekeeper friend that can help.

You are not an island

You are not the only beekeeper in the city. You will be surprised how many beekeepers have hives in close proximity to where you plan to set up.

Not only do you want to be a good beekeeper to your neighbours, you also need to be a good beekeeper to other urban beekeepers. You'll also want to do everything in your power to not encourage other honey bees or wasps to your yard.

Stay on top of varroa mite counts and diseases so it's not being spread around. Feed your bees when there is a nectar dearth and keep your yard clean of syrup, honey spills and comb. Put your supers away after extracting. Don't leave them outside for the bees to “clean up”.

Robbing

Robbing can turn calm bees into defensive bees. Robbing comes about late in the season when nectar sources are in the process of depleting. They, like wasps, will turn their attention to other sources of sugar, including a weaker bee hive (which causes defensiveness in that hive), spilled sugar or honey or fruit trees.

Extra Equipment

Don't scrimp on the equipment you are going to need. This equipment may sit in your shed unused. You should have extra boxes and frames, a lid and bottom board in case you have to home a swarm. Extra supers with frames are needed for when honey flows are on. Never leave a hive with no boxes to fill during a honey flow, even if they're off for the short length of time it takes to extract the honey.

Check with local beekeeping equipment suppliers for a list of equipment and costs.

Neighbour Concerns

If a neighbour has concerns or complaints about your beekeeping activities, you need to address these concerns respectfully and proactively. This may involve discussing the issue with the neighbour, providing additional information, or making changes to beekeeping practices.

Question

So, you've done everything in your power to be a good, conscientious beekeeper, but the neighbours continue to have issues with your bees. What are you going to do?

Additional Reading

Oregon State University Extension Service authored a very informative document on Residential Beekeeping and, if followed, you should be able to keep bees from becoming a nuisance to others. It is highly recommended that you download the PDF and give it a read.

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/em-9186-residential-beekeeping-best-practice-guidelines-nuisance-free-beekeeping-oregon?reference=catalog>

Sources

<https://moosejaw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Beekeeping-Policy-2020.pdf>

<https://www.mj-independent.com/council/2020/9/24/council>

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=8effceac-8e8f-4c81-9784-2a98bfbd7b4>