

BEE-KEEPING.

Bee-keeping is an ancient craft, the first record of honey harvesting from hives is about 5,000 years ago and keeping bees has always been part of the British way of life.

Today, bees need our help more than they have ever done and becoming a bee-keeper is a great contribution.

Set out below are some 'FAQ's

How do I start?

Contact a local Association and go along to their meetings. Talk to the secretary there and explain what you would like to do, he/she will advise you.

Read up on the subject. Libraries have a decent range of books. Ted Hooper's 'Guide to Bees and Honey' is reckoned to be the best general book that there is. It combines well the theoretical and the practical and gives an excellent oversight of what is involved.

How much does it cost?

You need a bee-suit, smoker, hive tool and a few other items, but about £180.00 will cover that. Less if you buy cheap, but good quality kit that you will use for years is an investment. About £350.00 for a hive and £125.00 for the bees. A total of about £950.00. Once you have the kit, you can increase the number of colonies yourself and need only the hives.

A spreadsheet of estimated costs is attached.

How much time does it take?

About 30 minutes per hive per week during the season, April to August. Extracting and processing the honey, about 2 to 3 hours per hive. Winter is the time to check, clean and repair equipment.

Where do I get bees and where can I keep them?

The Association can help you to obtain bees; either direct from the Association or by recommending a good supplier.

A site for hives does not have to be large, a garden will usually be fine; but it is politic to talk to your neighbours first unless you have a very large garden. You can also approach a land owner or a farmer for a site, an 'out apiary', and if you cannot find somewhere suitable, the Association will help. Councils are now allowing bees to be kept on allotments.

Will I get stung and does it hurt?

'Yes' and 'Yes'. You will get stung, you don't learn to ride a bike without falling off, and it does hurt.

However, you do get used to the odd sting, but the more experienced you become, the less you get stung. Very, very few people are truly allergic to bee stings; to most of us it is a 'ping', an inconvenience, and if you are stung through clothing it is easy to remove the sting.

How much honey will I get each year?

It is very weather dependent, but as a guide, in a normal year you can get about 30 to 40lbs per hive. In 2014, 1lb of honey was selling for £5.00 per jar so it is possible to cover your outgoings. However, if you want to make money, don't be a bee farmer.

You can sell your honey but as it's a food product, there are regulations. These are explained on the BBKA website and you can get guidance from the Association.

BBKA?

The British Beekeepers Association. The parent body for British bee-keepers.

Their website is BBKA.org.uk and is an excellent source of information and up to date news.

There is no reason to feel alone if you take up the craft. You will get help and advice from the Association, (beware: if you ask 3 bee-keepers you will get 4 opinions!) and often the offer of second hand equipment.

At Bournemouth And Dorset South BKA we have monthly winter meetings; a 'Taster Day' in April or May when for some £25.00 you have a morning in the classroom and the afternoon at one of the training apiaries where you can don a loan bee suit and handle frames of bees under tuition; and for 14 weeks during the summer we hold training sessions every Saturday afternoon from April to September, that is 14 weeks of tuition.

The annual subscription to BADS is £28.00 per year for full membership and £18.00 for associate membership, so it is excellent value.

There is also a monthly news letter Emailed to all members plus notification of anything important and general up dates.

But above all is the need to help honey bees; and not just honey bees. All pollinating insects are having a difficult time of it, and there does not seem to be much respite on the horizon.

Even if you don't take up bee-keeping, and we sincerely hope that you will, you can garden without pesticides; plant bee-friendly plants; leave wild areas in your garden; sign petitions pushing a green agenda and generally make your voice heard.

However, if you do start beekeeping you will be taking up an ancient craft with one of the most interesting insects on the planet. They are among the most studied of animals and yet each year some new understanding is gained about them or their behaviour that leaves you shaking your head. They are truly amazing creatures.

So you will be helping bees to survive and thrive; you will be providing pollination for fruit, flowers and vegetables, and hopefully become an ambassador for a more sustainable way of life.

And on top of all this the pleasure of giving a jar of honey to friends or relatives and saying, casually, "Yes, actually it is from my bees", is one that never will cease to delight.

So, contact your local Association, they will be delighted to hear from you, and the bees will be happy to have another friend.

Peter Darley.

Secretary BADSBKA,

BADS-BKA.org