

Come Grow with Us!

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Getting Started with Honeybees

We all have heard it before: “Honeybees are important pollinators for our food supply”; “save the bees from extinction”, etc...

Well, according to USDA numbers, honeybee populations are at a 20 year high following a [national honeybee census](#).

Honeybees are interesting animals that have impressed humans for centuries. They were first domesticated in Anatolia (Middle East) close to 9,000 years ago. These incredible insects act as one unit, closely communicating with one another for the greater good of their hive.

Starting out

For beginning beekeepers it is ideal to initiate with two to five hives. Having more than one hive will help compensate from winter losses. Once a hive has become established, it can produce 50 to 100 pounds of surplus honey each year.

It is suggested that beginning beekeepers take a class before you invest in bees and equipment. It is imperative that you learn how to manage disease such as nosema and colony collapse disorder as part of this class. There are several opportunities for beekeepers throughout the year offered by UF.

The next step in your bee progress is to join a local and state beekeeping association for additional benefits such as continuing educational programs, networking, etc.

When you are ready to purchase supplies, you will have many companies to choose from. You can purchase prebuilt hives and beginning beekeeper bundles or you can build them from scratch. Order your bees early for the next year. Suppliers of bees commonly take orders for nucleus colonies, called nucs for short, or package bees in November and December, for delivery in April or May. Ahead of time before your colonies arrive, make sure that you have all the components of your bee hive and working equipment. The hive should be set a month before you receive your bees.

What a good colony looks like

A strong population is key to the survival of your bee enterprise. The queen bee should lay eggs in a full brood pattern in the frames of the hive. A brood covering eight to ten frames is a good sign of a strong colony. Your colony will reach numbers of 75,000 bees during its peak summer

season. Brood frames should cover two hive boxes and be sure to include at least an additional box for honey supers.

You will see drones in the Spring, but they will be forced from the hive by the worker bees in the fall. During the summer you will see close to 1,000 drones inside the hive.



Figure 1. Apiculture is on the rise with more people interested in starting their own backyard beehives, but it can also expand into an additional source of revenue for your farm or family.

Swarming is a measure of docility. Docile beehives will not tend to swarm when managed. Out of all the strains of honeybees, Italian honeybees are the most docile and are recommended for beginner beekeepers.

Expected honey production

Depending on nectar availability, each colony can produce a surplus of 50-100 lbs of honey each season after producing an additional 40 - 80 lbs for its survival in the winter months. Honey supers can be harvested and honey should be left in the brood boxes for winter food source. If there is little flower bloom in the winter time you can supplement honeybees with sugar water at one part water to two parts sugar.

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Where to locate our beehives?

Locate your apiary in a place near flowering shrubs, trees and other plants. A good supply of water should be provided within a quarter of a mile from the beehives. Water sources such as birdbaths, dog bowls and ponds are adequate for your hive. If the container is too deep, you can provide a source such as rocks for bees to land and consume what they need.

The honeybee hive should be placed east or south with a northern windbreak. It should be placed away from any human or livestock paths and hidden from unwanted visitors.

Provide a weed barrier such as groundcover cloth or rocks to avoid disturbing the hive. Place the hives 18 inches above the ground on a stand to minimize damage from rodents or skunks. Provide a screen bottom board for dead pests to drop through.

Basic Hive parts:

- Two brood boxes, called "deeps," for the brood
- Two super boxes, called "mediums" or "supers," for excess honey stores
- Bottom board, either screened or solid reversible
- Entrance reducer
- Queen excluder (optional)
- Inner cover
- Telescoping lid

There is lots to learn when it comes to beekeeping. It is a great source of entertainment, and viable source of revenue if you plan on expanding your apiary. For more information on this topic, please call the UF/IFAS Extension Hardee County office at 863-773-2164.

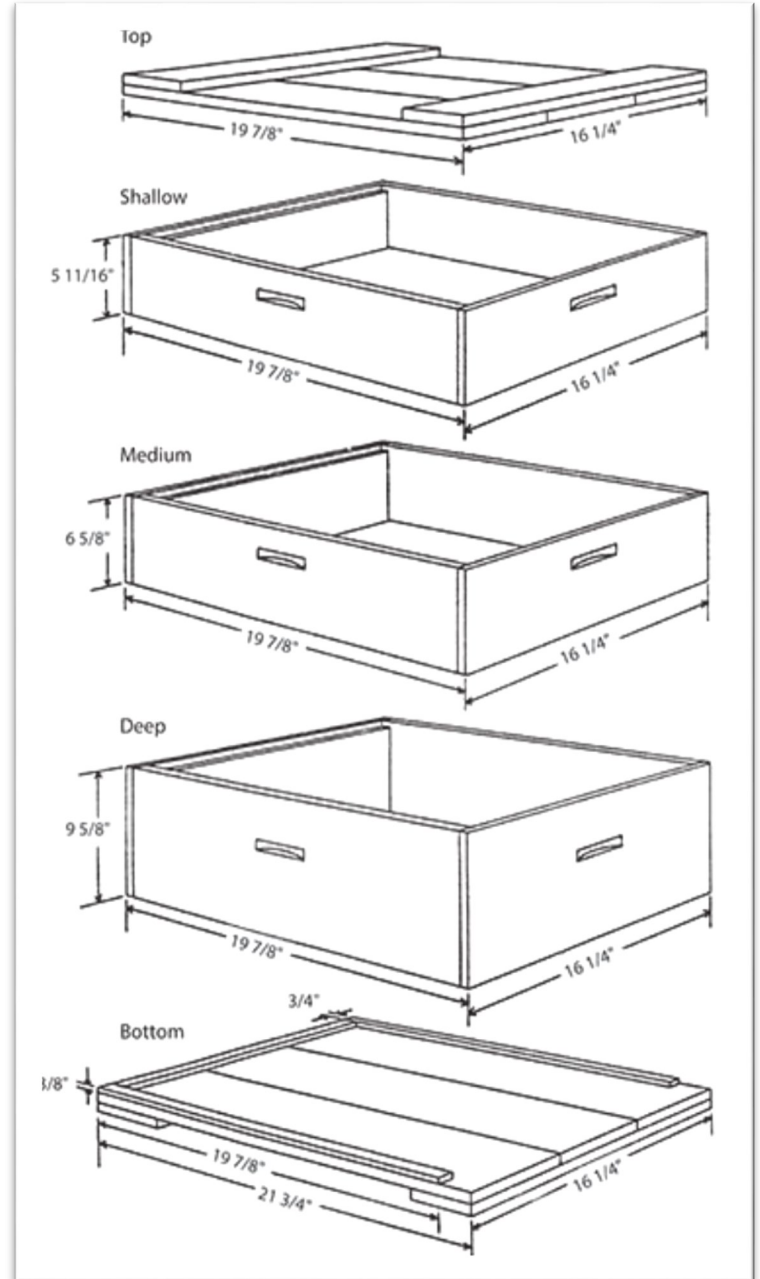


Figure 2
Parts of a beehive. Bees are reared in a brood chamber in the lowest level of the hive. Honey is stored in upper levels.
Source: University of Missouri Extension.