

Getting Started

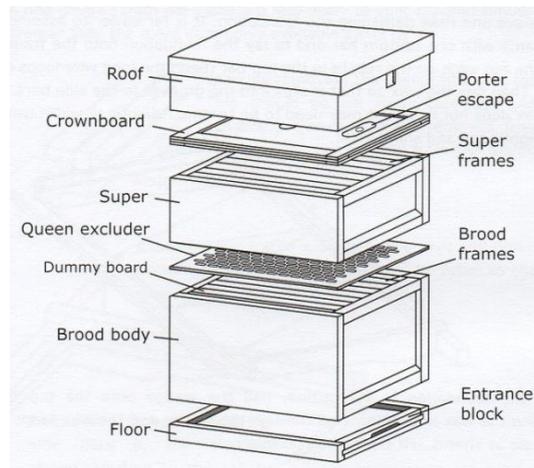
A Newbee's guide to beekeeping

If you're reading this you have probably just starting out as a beekeeper. Below is some of what I would have liked to have known when I began

Equipment

Basic kit – Realistically you are looking at about £200 minimum.

- **Hive** – 1 broodbox, 2 supers, roof, floor, crownboard, entrance block, hive stand, frames, foundation, queen excluder & porter bee escapes. **New cost £100 - £400+**
- **Beesuit** or jacket with veil, gloves & wellies. **New cost £40 - £100+**
- **Smoker** – Go large it stays alight longer. **New cost £25 - £40**
- **Hive Tool** – Maybe buy two, you're sure to lose one. **New cost £5 - £10**
- **Mouseguard** – Keeps mice out in winter. **New cost £1**
- **Hive Strap** – Holds hive parts together in windy weather or when in transport. **New cost £5**



Picture courtesy BBKA

Main Hive Types

Chose carefully. Equipment from different hives types is often similar but often incompatible in terms of size. This site may help you choose

<http://www.eastdevonbeekeepers.co.uk/page6.html>

- **National** – Popular across UK.
- **14 x 12 National** – Deeper brood box
- **Smith** – Slightly smaller than National – Popular locally and in Scotland.
- **Langstroth** – Very popular around the world, less so in the UK.
- **WBC** – The vicar's choice, pretty but not always practical.
- **Top Bar** – Popular in developing countries, a left field choice.
- **Beehaus** – Colourful, contemporary, controversial. A Marmite hive.
- **Others** – Commercial, Rose, Dartington, Dadant, Warre.

Hive Materials

- **Western red Cedar** – The premier choice, light, long lasting but costly.
- **Cedar** – Similar but less expensive, don't assume all cedar is Western Red Cedar.
- **Pine** – More affordable, heavier and may need to treat wood for longer life.
- **Ply** – Ensure exterior grade ply used, less expensive again but prone to delaminating.
- **Polystyrene** – Good insulation, popular in N. Europe, now available in National in UK.

Equipment Suppliers (New)

This section is a listing not an endorsement, nor is it an exhaustive list. Some suppliers sell beginners kits and these can represent good value compared to buying components individually.

Supplier	Websire	Comment
Thorne	www.thorne.co.uk	UK's largest beekeeping general equipment supplier.
Paynes	http://www.paynesbeefarm.co.uk/store/	Another large longstanding general equipment supplier
National Bee Supplies	http://www.beekeeping.co.uk/	General equipment supplier
Fragile Planet	http://www.fragile-planet.co.uk/	Budget minded general equipment supplier, mainly ply and pine hives.
Stanfordham Ltd	http://www.stanfordham.biz/	Local equipment supplier
Caddon Hives	http://www.caddon-hives.co.uk/	Smaller, popular supplier of hives and hive accessories
Modern Beekeeping	http://www.modernbeekeeping.co.uk/	Supplier of bee clothing & Polystyrene hives
Maismore Apiaries	http://www.bees-online.co.uk/	Another large longstanding general equipment supplier
C. Wynne Jones	www.beesupplies.co.uk	Family run equipment supplier,
Richfield	http://www.rich-field.co.uk/pages/bee-hives.html	Small Yorkshire supplier
The Hive Maker	http://thehivemaker.co.uk/	Local, quality supplier
Bee Equipment Ltd	http://www.mannlake.co.uk/	US supplier recently established in UK
Solway Bee Supplies	http://www.solwaybeesupplies.co.uk/	General equipment supplier
Ebay	www.ebay.com	Many suppliers also sell, often anonymously, on Ebay. Can get good deals, beware not to pay more than list prices.

Equipment – Previously Owned

Previously owned equipment can be a bargain if it is in good condition. However caution should be taken because the previous owner's colony could have died of disease. Always discard old comb (can be used for candle making), scrape clean the kit and then scorch with a blowlamp until timber just darkens. Ebay, Beecraft your local association and more recently bee equipment auction websites are all possible sources.

Training

The Newcastle Association does not directly run any formal training however there are several local courses. The length varies from a half day tasters to ten week courses and costs vary from £100 - £200. They are most often run in Spring and early summer. Ideally look for a course that mixes both theory and practical and gives you as much hands on experience as possible in small groups.

- **Northumberland College**, Kirkley Hall Campus, Ponteland. 'Introduction to Beekeeping' –. Contact Alison Gracey 01670 841229 or www.northumberland.ac.uk
- **Ian Wallace** at Ouseburn Farm. Contact www.purehoneycomb.co.uk for details.
- **The Newcastle Association Apiary** runs a series of monthly Saturday morning sessions on various topics in the summer and is a great place to increase knowledge.
- **Newcastle & District beekeepers facebook page**: Information and support for local beekeepers.
- **Peer support** of folks at the same stage as you can be invaluable. If your taking a course maybe share an e-mail list of participants before it ends.
- **Mentoring** arrangements have faltered recently due to the number of new beekeepers which has swamped the more experienced, but there is no harm asking.

Time

Time commitment varies seasonally. October to March is a quiet time. April through to July is a busy time to avoid swarming. Hives need be inspected regularly, ideally weekly in peak season, allow at least 20 – 30 minutes per hive.

Obtaining Bees

Now the tricky one. It's a question of supply and demand and demand is high. Most beekeepers will strongly advise getting bees as **locally** as possible. They will be better suited to the climate and it helps avoid the danger of bringing disease into an area.

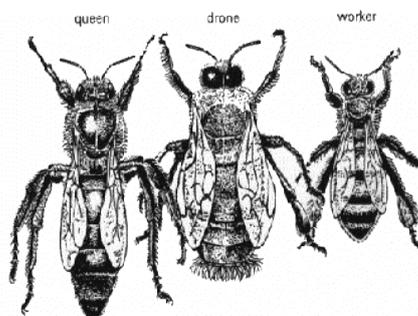
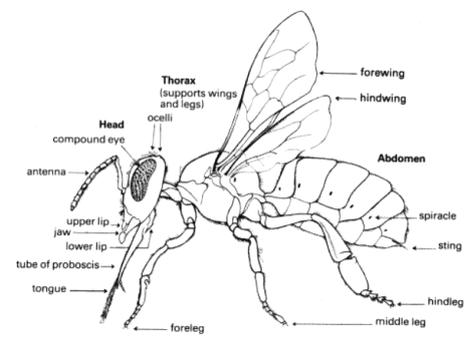
There are several ways...

- **Getting a nucleus**, aka nuc, (a small colony) from a commercial supplier or smaller bee keeper with surplus. Normally containing 4 - 6 frames with a queen, some brood, stores and worker bees. Costs vary from **£100 - £200** (bees only not the nuc box). Local bees in this area are often described as British Black Bees or dark bees. Check age of the queen and ask for assurance on being a gentle strain and disease free.
- **Being given or collecting a swarm**. Probably a bit daunting to go and collect one yourself as a novice without experienced support but that's just me. Being given a swarm can be an unknown quantity in terms of temperament, productivity and age of queen but hey it's free.
- **A full colony** from a supplier or retiring beekeeper – May be a lot to handle to begin with, whereas a nuc increases in size over your first season in step with you gaining experience.

Who from....

- **Newcastle BKA** members sometimes raise nucs for sale to members. Ask or at our meeting or talk to our apiary managers.
- BBKA '**Beecraft**' magazines classified section has bees for sale, some locally.

Some Bee Facts



Picture courtesy BBKA

- A strong colony can hold 50,000 bees at its peak, this will drop to 10,000 in winter.
- A Queen can lay up to 2,000 eggs per day.
- How many: 4 wings, 5 eyes, 6 legs.
- How fast – up to 20 mph
- Stinging can be triggered by weather, clothing, sudden movements, and strong odours.
- Average lifecycle in Days

	Worker	Drone	Queen
Egg	0 - 3	0 - 3	0 - 3
Larvae	3 - 9	3 - 10	3 - 8
Cell Sealed	9 - 21	10 - 24	8 - 16
Hatch	21	24	16
Life expectancy	35 - 180	20 - 60	3-4years

Apiary Location

Chose a place for your Apiary (Place where honeybee hives are kept). Things to consider are...

- Hive entrances should not face onto roads, paths or nearby housing.
- Ideal hive position faces entrance south and offers partial shade to full sun.
- The site should be chosen to minimize inconvenience to others.
- Risks of vandalism and theft should be considered.
- A water source must be available nearby on your land, not next doors pond.
- Avoid areas prone to flooding or frost pockets.
- Small urban back gardens are often not ideal sites.
- Consider fencing as a windbreak and to raise flightpath above head height

Newcastle Beekeepers Association – The Benefits

- British Beekeepers Association Affiliation – National organisation
- Free 3rd Party public liability insurance. This is an important one
- Contact with other beekeepers.
- Advice and assistance from experienced beekeepers.
- Free lectures and demonstrations.
- Brood disease insurance.
- Regular local and national newsletters 'The Pheromone' and 'BBKA News'.
- Access to regular meeting at the Association Apiary during the Summer.
- Free access to comprehensive beekeeping library.

- Information on the local association via website and Facebook.
- Information about second hand equipment availability.

Useful Books and Websites

Books – Many, many books on beekeeping, here are a few well regarded ones.

- **Haynes Bee Manual** – Comprehensive and popular step by step advice
- **Guide to Bees & Honey – Ted Hooper** – A classic reference book
- **Practical Beekeeping – Cive De Bruyn** – Another Classic – last updated in 1997
- **BBKA Guide to beekeeping - Ivor Davis, Roger Cullum-Kenyon** – BBKA endorsed
- **Collins Beekeeping Bible** – Large and comprehensive, normally a fraction of rrp on Amazon but some versions have printing errors.
- **Keeping Bees: A Complete Practical Guide – Paul Peacock** – Less formal than some, clear explanations – Available in Newcastle library catalogue.
- **Bees at the Bottom of the Garden** - Alan Champion & Gay Hodgson - Often described as clear, sensible, humorous and good for beginners.

Websites – Useful info & forums to ask questions

- **British Beekeepers Association** <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/> - Comprehensive site for UK beekeepers
- **British beekeepers' Association Beekeeping Forum** <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/forum/> - discussion forum.
- **Dave Cushman** - <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/newhome.html> - Encyclopaedic information on all things bee related.
- **Beekeeping Forum** - <http://www.beekeepingforum.co.uk/> - Useful discussion & advice forum.
- **BBKA Forum** - <http://www.britishbee.org.uk/forum/index.php> - Another discussion & advice forum.
- **Graham Law** - <http://homepage.nflworld.com/gandboss/OldSite/index.htm> - Interesting FAQ section for new beekeepers.

Beekeepers' Year

Beekeepers have different ideas about when their year starts. I'm going to stay simple

Jan – Check hive for damage, check entrances are clear of dead bees, feed fondant if needed, clear or consider shading entrance during snow, LEAVE ALONE.

Feb – As above, also consider what new equipment needed for season ahead

March – Remove mouseguard, put in entrance block, check for stores running out as colony increases, feed if required.

April – Inspections should begin, choose a warm sunny day if possible. Look for evidence of a Queen (eggs, larvae). Check for signs of disease. Monitor stores, consider feeding with syrup during cold/wet periods. Consider changing some old combs. Monitor for signs of swarming (Queen cups & cells) and ensure additional equipment available ready for swarming. Possibly unite weak colonies.

May – Inspect regularly, check if colony expanding, monitor Varroa levels, monitor regularly for signs of swarming split colonies if swarming imminent. Add supers if needed. Consider removing entrance block. Main Oil Seed Rape flowering.

June – Continue inspecting regularly, be vigilant for swarming. Add supers if required

July - Swarming mainly over, add supers as required. Prepare kit for upcoming extraction.

August – Continue to add supers if needed. Take bees to Heather if you have opportunity, harvest honey when $\frac{3}{4}$ capped. Honey crop can vary from 10kg 75kg per established colony, leave enough honey for the bees to overwinter. Consider uniting weak colonies.

September – Treat for Varroa if using Thymol, use before temperature drops below 15°C. Start preparing colonies for Winter. Consider feeding with thick syrup (2kg white sugar to 1 litre water), consumption rate varies widely. Check for disease. Consider re-queening.

October – Check for queen during inspection, choose a warm day. Fit entrance blocks & mouseguards, strap down hive & weigh down.

November – Leave alone, watch for blocked entrances. Start planning for next year.

December – As above. Apply Oxalic acid for varroa towards end of month when no brood. Check adequate ventilation to avoid condensation. Make long Christmas wish list and distribute.

The First 50 words of your new language.

1. **Apiguard** – Popular brand of Thymol treatment for varroa. Also Apilife Var as alternative.
2. **Apis Mellifera Mellifera** – Dark European Bee.
3. **Artificial swarm** – technique used to stop loss of bees and honey due to swarming.
4. **American Foul Brood (AFB)** - notifiable brood disease caused by a bacterial spores.
5. **Beebase** – DEFRA's National Bee Unit website, free up to date info on keeping bees healthy.
6. **Bee Craft** – Monthly magazine of the BBKA. By subscription £24pa.
7. **Bee Space** – Gap between combs for bees to crawl through. Usually 6 – 8mm.
8. **Brace Comb** – Random patches of comb outside frames.
9. **Brood** - refers to the egg, larva and the pupa stages in the life of honey bee.
10. **Brood Box** – The larger lower chamber of many beehives, used to raise brood in.
11. **Bumblebee** – Relative of honey bee often larger, fuzzier and lives in small groups.
12. **Cap** – A thin wax cover sealing cell of brood or honey.
13. **Cast** – A second or later swarm coming from a hive. Will have a young virgin queen.
14. **Cold Way** – Frames in hive at right angles to entrance.
15. **Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD)** - Phenomenon in which honey bees from a colony abruptly disappear. The cause or causes of the syndrome are not yet fully understood.
16. **Chalk Brood** - A common, mild disease of honey bee brood caused by a fungus.
17. **Crown Board** – Separates supers from the roof.
18. **Drone** - A Male Bee.
19. **Dummy board** – a wooden panel used to fill gaps between hive walls & frames,
20. **Entrance block** - a way of varying the size of the hive entrance during the season.
21. **European Foul Brood (EFB)** – A notifiable bacterial infection of brood.
22. **Extractor** – A mechanical device to remove honey from honey comb.
23. **Feeder** – A container to feed syrup to bees, many different types available
24. **Floor** – The base of the hive. Some are open mesh to reduce varroa others are solid
25. **Fondant** – Sugar based paste to feed bees in winter.
26. **Foundation** – Thin flat sheets of beeswax imprinted with hexagon to build into cells.
27. **Frames** – Rectangular wooden structures that hold foundation. Many sizes.
28. **Hive tool** – A metal tool for levering open hive parts also for scraping – J type popular.
29. **Integrated Pest Management** - A combination of strategies to help beekeepers keep healthy hives.
30. **Oxalic acid** – Winter Varroa treatment.
31. **Nectar** – High carbohydrate sugary food source transformed by bees into honey.
32. **Nosema** – A parasitic gut infection of bees
33. **Nucleus (Nuc)** – A small colony of bees often housed in a small hive (nuc box)
34. **Pheromone** - Mixtures of chemical substances released by bees to communicate.
35. **Pollen** – Produced by flowers & used by bee as protein source mainly for larvae.
36. **Porter Bee Escape** – A one way valve used to allow bees to move in one direction only.
37. **Propolis** – A type of bee glue made from tree sap and used to fill gaps in hives.
38. **Queen** – Fertile female bee that lays all eggs. Different size & shape to other bees.
39. **Queen Excluder** – A grid spaced so the queen can't pass through up into supers.
40. **Queen cells** – Special vertical cell for rearing queens. Looks like a peanut shell.
41. **Skep** – A straw basket hive, now mainly used for catching swarms.
42. **Smoker** – A metal container with bellows. A small fire is lit inside the smoke pacifies bees.
43. **Super** – Shallow box normally above brood box. Used for honey storage.
44. **Swarm** – A division of a colony by an old queen leaving a hive with older bees.
45. **Syrup** – Liquid bee food. Thin (1:1) in Spring, thick (2:1) in autumn.
46. **Varroa** – Parasitic mite common in UK. Weakens bees, if left untreated colony can die.
47. **Waggle Dance** – Bee communication that alerts other bees to nectar or pollen source.
48. **Warm Way** - Frames in hive at parallel to entrance.
49. **Wax Moth** – Pest that can seriously damage bee comb
50. **Worker** – An unfertilised female bee. Makes up the vast majority of bees in a hive.