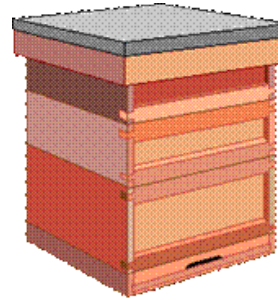


What do I need to start beekeeping?

Obviously you need a hive with bees but you need to make a decision on what type of hive and what type of bee. You also need some spare hive parts indeed a whole spare hive is useful so that you can deal with swarms easily, a cheap second hand one would be fine.

The Complete (single walled) Hive:

- Roof
- Crown board
- Up to three or more (honey) super* boxes
- Queen excluder
- Brood box
- Floor



*Super from the Latin for 'above' i.e. superscript or perhaps superman :-)

The Beekeepers Equipment:

- Bee suit and veil
- Suitable boots
- Bee gloves
- Smoker
- Hive tool
- Queen marking cage and pen
- A feeder to feed your bee's sugar syrup
- A Porter bee escape (a one-way valve for bees)
- A good book for reference



How much time does it take up

Beekeeping is a seasonal hobby therefore the time varies with the seasons. In the middle of winter there is practically nothing to do, except to occasionally check

for physical damage or snow blocking the entrances. The busiest time is the early summer when each hive should be checked weekly to stop swarming and add supers. This need take no longer than a few minutes when you get the hang of it. Here is a simplified overview of your year as a beekeeper.

The beekeeper's year (England UK)

Month	Tasks
Jan	 Check roofs and entrances for blockages by leaves or snow.
Feb	 Check hives for food, feed as necessary
March	 Change/clean floor  Continue to monitor food levels  Monitor <u>Varroa levels</u> , this continues through the season from now on. High levels of mites found will need treating sooner rather than later.
April	 First <u>inspection</u> on mild day, checking health , food, queen is ok (Queenright),  Replace old comb
May	 Start weekly <u>swarm prevention</u> inspections  Add <u>supers</u> (honey boxes) as necessary  Start to breed new queens as part of your swarm prevention and good management.  With planning, now is the time to <u>increase your hive count</u> on Your terms (ie not the bees terms ...you are the boss)
June	 Continue weekly swarm prevention inspections and add supers.

- If the bees have been getting nectar from early Oil Seed Rape (OSR) then this honey will need to be removed by now.

July

- Still adding supers and inspecting for swarming

Aug

- Remove main honey crop
- Best time to treat for Varroa by using Varroacides
- Restrict the entrance to prevent other bees or wasps from robbing your hives

Sept

- Feed for the winter
- Remove any Varroa strips at end of treatment period
- Sort out how many hives you want to start next year with by reducing your hive count, combining two into one.

Oct

- No further internal inspections from now on
- Fit mouse guards for the onset of winter

Nov

- Check externals routinely especially after severe weather in case of storm damage.

Dec

- As October but you should be attending your local association meetings and making your plans for next year based on this year's experiences.
- Possible to treat Varroa with organic acids



How much is it going to cost me to get started

You can spend a small fortune if you buy everything new and buy everything possible and make the beekeeping suppliers very happy.

In practice in the UK a second-hand hive with bees cost around £50-70 and your local association might do you a good deal as a new member. A new bee suit and veil will be between £40-£100 the other bits and pieces if you buy new such as smoker, gloves etc should come to less than £100. The most expensive piece of equipment you will want within a year or two will be a honey extractor and these start at around £150 up, most associations will allow you use of a shared extractor.

Do I need to belong to a local association?

This is to be highly recommended as your association will keep you in touch with local expertise, and local problems and conditions. They will often run training programs and undoubtedly have topical meetings, newsletters etc. In the UK most associations are affiliated with the [BBKA](#) which means you have joined two associations really. Your [BBKA](#) membership gives you third party and product (honey) [insurance](#).

Do I require a licence to keep bees?

Not in the UK, in some other countries yes.

When & how should I start



We'll think of beekeeping as a circle, it is locked to the seasons and you could start at any point in that circle but it is best to start by planning and reading and talking to beekeepers. So, the best time to start that process is late summer or autumn by first joining your local association. You may not even need to join initially, most will allow you to attend as guest or visitor. Then go to their winter meetings usually monthly where you will meet real beekeepers and listen to talks and subjects related to the craft.

Sound out your ideas with several beekeepers keeping in mind that two beekeepers are likely to give you three different opinions, and there are usually several correct options anyway. Be wary of anyone giving you dogmatic advice like...you must do this or that or you must use such & such hive style. There are very few 'musts' in beekeeping. Many beekeepers hold strong opinions usually based on how they have always kept bees, but remember bees are tremendously forgiving

creatures and survive in many instances *despite* the keeper. Be your own person and make your own mind up, make your own small mistakes and learn from them.

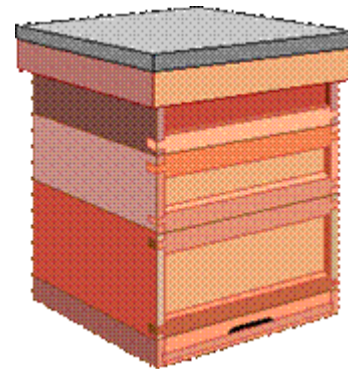
After the winter you will probably be able to join a beginners course and obtain a small hive starter colony either directly from your association or from a beekeeper who may be cutting back. The association website will also allow you to advertise your wants and the Spring Convention in Builth is a great place to buy your new equipment in time for the season. *Tip: Have a clear idea what you want & take an experienced beekeeper with you, get there for the doors opening at 9:00am as the best bargains go fast.*

How do I decide on what hive type to use?



WBC Hive

There are several designs available and there is often heated debate amongst beekeepers on the benefits and shortcomings of each. What is important from the beginner's point of view is to choose ONE style and stick to it as having a mix of styles is frustrating in the long term with hive parts not being interchangeable.



British National Hive

The 'classic' picturesque terraced bee hive that beginners have in mind in the UK is usually the WBC (William Broughton Carr 1890) hive. This is a double walled hive utilising inner boxes and outer covers called 'lifts'. This hive is out of favour, with most hobbyists in the UK using the single walled British National Hive. The British National uses the same internal frames as the WBC but has fewer components to move during routine inspections. As the British National is the most common it is also the easiest in the UK to pick up second hand, it also has cheaper frames as it benefits from more people using them.

You may come across the British National Hive described as the British Modified National, this stems from a change in the design eons ago to add handles and no 'unmodified' hives are manufactured now, but you may come across them on the second-hand market. They mix and match just fine with the 'new' design but are less easy to lift.

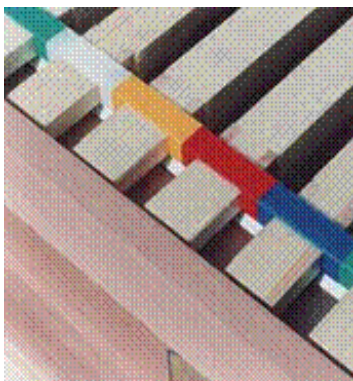
The other styles that are used in the UK and are common elsewhere are the Langstroth & the Commercial both are single walled and larger than the British National. In the north of the UK especially Scotland the Smith hive is popular, this

is a nice compromise and uses the same frames as the National except that the frame lugs are shorter. (*Lugs are the bits that stick out at the top of the frame*)

Should I use Open Mesh Floors (OMF)

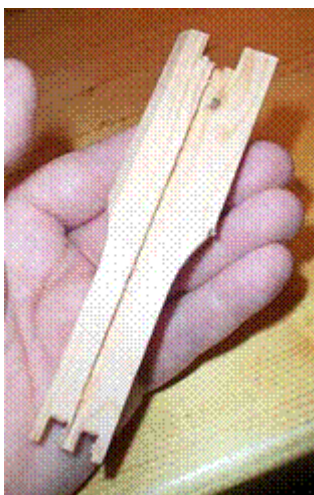
Open Mesh Floors were originally introduced to help diagnose Varroa by allowing the mite to fall through onto a tray beneath the colony. The natural drop can be used as an indicator to estimate the mite population. It was noted by many beekeepers that in addition to the Varroa features the bees seemed to benefit from the additional ventilation offered by this piece of equipment. It allows you to keep a narrow entrance all year around which is easier for the bees to defend, there are also thought to be benefits from live Varroa falling out of the colony and perishing. All in all, there are definite benefits from using OMF's.

What style of frame should I use?



**Frames with
coloured plastic spacers**

This basically comes down to self-spacing frames called Hoffman frames and conventional frames that require separate spacers. Space between the frames is important to give what is known as 'Bee Space' this is the gap that bees will use as a passage and not fill in with more wax comb. Hoffman frames have a slightly tighter spacing than that given by conventional frames using spacers and some beekeepers claim this to be detrimental, most do not. In the past few years it is evident that many new beekeepers are using only Hoffman frames. They are certainly less fiddly to use. There is a good case to use Hoffman frames in the brood chamber where the frames remain a fixed distance and use narrow or wide spacers in the supers as required.



**Hoffman Side Bar
(SN4)**

The most popular UK styles are coded as follows

Brood frame codes:

DN1 = Deep (British) National

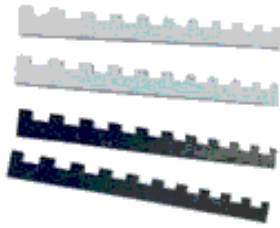
DN2 = as DN1 + wide top bar

DN4 = as DN1 with Hoffman style side bars

Super frames are coded SN1, SN2 or SN4

Tip: Plastic frame spacers come in five colours the intention being to use them to indicate the age of the frame in a same way as marking the age of a queen. In practice few people use this system but what is useful, is to use the same coloured spacer on the right-hand side and a different colour on the left. When reassembling the hive, it is then easy to see that all the frames have been returned as their original orientation.

Should I use castellation's



Castellation fix the exact positions of frames and neglect the need for either Hoffman frames or spacers. This sounds like good news but they prevent you from widening the bee space in the supers and from sliding frames around whilst manipulation the brood. Best to start without them and try them at a later date should you wish too.

What type of bee suit should I buy



Good

Put simply the best you can afford. As a beginner the more secure you feel the better you will enjoy your first steps in beekeeping. It is not advisable to buy a veil only but go for either a full suit or a jacket or smock which include a built-in veil. The older style veils that have netting all around the back can cause problems when the netting folds inwards letting the odd bee sting the back of your neck. Best to



Better

buy one that has a fabric back
looking a bit like a fencing helmet. .

What type of Smoker should I buy

Smokers come basically in two sizes: large & small, and manufactured in three types of metal...

- **Tin plated steel:** Cheapest option but expect it to look pretty tired within two seasons.
- **Copper:** More resistant to corrosion but has a tendency to get easily dented.
- **Stainless steel:** Best but the more expensive option.



A wire guard stops you from burning yourself but is a less common option on a small smoker.

Size isn't everything :-) The larger the smoker the longer it will run without refuelling and the traditional advice is to buy the larger smoker. However, with the advent of compressed cotton as a fuel then this point is not as valid. A small smoker loaded with this fuel will last a very long time indeed and a small smoker is less cumbersome to use. For the new beekeeper with only one or two hives, a large smoker that last for hours is unnecessary.

Where do I get my beekeeping equipment from?

There may not be a supplier of new equipment locally to you but the larger suppliers run excellent mail order schemes and you can also order on the web (*see Websites of interest*). A word of caution if you buy or acquire second hand equipment, some bee diseases lay dormant for decades and old woodwork must be sterilised by flame prior to being put back into service.

Can I make my own hives?



Yes you can and the plans are available from the likes of the [BBKA](#) & www.beesource.com or from the [specialist book stores](#) in the appendix. A word of caution... making 'a box' is not difficult but making an accurate brood box or super that will stand up to years of use and fit against other such boxes without gaps after the wood has fully seasoned is another proposition.

The professionally made equipment, especially if made from cedar wood, will last a life time and the manufacturers are well geared up for mass production and buy cedar in vast quantities. Alternatively, good second-hand equipment can be purchased and cleaned up, but be aware of possible sources of disease when using old equipment from unknown sources as mentioned above.

IMHO, you would need to get a kick out of it to consider building your own brood box's or supers, but building your own roofs and floors is perhaps more worthwhile.

Where do I get my bees from?

- **From a beekeeper:**

Often an old beekeeper is cutting down and can be a good source of healthy stock and equipment. Try advertising your requirements in your local association newsletter. A friendly beekeeper may even be prepared to [split](#) one of his colonies in half to get you going.

- **From a swarm:**

Some beekeepers have been known to start when a swarm has landed in their garden, this is not to be recommended. A good healthy swarm via an experienced beekeeper can be a cheap source of bees but they are likely to have a tendency to swarm

next year too and there is an increased chance of picking up bees carrying a disease.

- **From your local association:**

Some associations provide 'starter colonies' for beginners or will supply bees only, often delivered and installed for you by an experienced beekeeper. This should be a good way to start.

- **By post:**

Bee breeders and some equipment suppliers advertise in the bee press will post you what is called a 'package' of bees in a travelling box or a nucleus hive. In the UK it is more usual to buy a nucleus hive often shortened to just 'Nuc' pronounce 'nook'.

A nucleus hive is typically half the size of a normal hive and typically has five brood frames with a queen ready to be transferred to a full-size hive. This can provide high quality bees but certainly at a price. Make sure the frames are compatible with your equipment when ordering and the queen will be available marked or/and clipped for small additional charge.

A 'Package' of bees is loose bees without frames in a special travelling box containing the bees with their queen in a separate cage. The travelling box has a feeder built in to nourish the bees during transport.

What 'type' of bee do I have a choice of

As a beginner, do not concern yourself too much with the precise details of bee breeding, it is a subject that cause much debate amongst experienced beekeepers. You should be aware that there are 'strains' of the *Apis Mellifera* honey bee that offer benefits such as higher honey production, gentle/non-aggressive, low swarm instinct. These are the three major characteristics to be aware of and naturally you "want" all three and this is something of a Holy Grail for beekeeping. For example, frequently you will find that aggressive bees are also the most productive.

As a beginner, try to start with the best tempered local hybrids you can obtain as they will already be suited to your area. You will need to rely on an experienced beekeeper probably from your local association to select bees for you in the first instance.

Will I Get Stung If I Keep Bees?

Yes. A few people are allergic, but most will swell for a short time and then gradually become more immune.

Just how many bees might there be in my hive

In mid-summer the hive population can exceed 35,000 bees. About 40% of these will remain in the hive as they are too young to fly for forage.

Can I keep my bees on my allotment?

Yes, but do, do the following:

-  Contact the secretary of the allotment society to ask for a site.
-  The secretary should then ask all the allotment holders if this is OK.
-  If they agree you will have to prove to them that you are covered by insurance to the amount that the council require (in Leicestershire it is £5,000,000 third party).
-  They also may require proof that you are competent at keeping bees asking you to produce a certificate and your experience to date.
-  It will also be in your best interest to only open the bees when allotment holders close to your hives are not working on their allotments, this will avoid problems. Working in a late evening is best as agitated bees can settle overnight.

- Site the hives such as bees do not fly towards gardeners and have an obstacle such as a high fence, trees or a hedge in front of the entrance to force the bees to fly high. Try to ensure bonfires are not a possibility near the hives.
- Only use clearer boards when taking the Honey off, remember that the allotment holders only want your bees for pollination, not for you to get honey, obey the rules and your honey harvest will be great, cause a problem and you will be asked to move them the same night.

If You are an Allotment Owner/Committee Member:

- Read the above and ensure competence and insurance matters are addressed.
- Best if the beekeeper has a few years experience under their belt, say five years.
- Make sure you have backup contact numbers for other supporting beekeepers.
- Be aware that bees will try to swarm, a good beekeeper will prevent most but bees will be bees and a odd swarm in May-July is a possibility. Not aggressive but will be dramatic.
- Bees sting! ... and anyone being stung by 'anything' on the allotment may well blame the bees, so some education of your members prior to putting hives on the allotment will be advantageous perhaps emphasising better setting fruits and more crop from all plants that flower.
- Also check out: www.allotments.net/general/bees.htm

Can I keep bees in my garden?

Yes, in the UK there is no legislation to stop you; this may not be the case in other countries. Unless you have a larger garden, it would be advisable to keep no more than two colonies. These colonies **MUST** be gentle in nature and as a beginner you need an experienced beekeeper to assess your bees before putting them in your

garden. You should always have a means of getting beekeeping help at short notice in case of early problems.

How many hives can I keep in my garden

Unless you have a substantial plot no more than two hives in a garden is best. If you want to keep more hives then you should consider setting up an 'out apiary' perhaps on a nearby farm. Most arable farmers appreciate the benefit of bees and are often obliging to a beekeeper's requests.

Can I use a lawnmower near the hive?



The key word is 'near', gentle bees will not generally cause problems if you go no closer than three metres from the hive. It helps if the hive entrance is facing away from you as bees will fly straight out on the same flight path each time, should they accidentally hit the gardener cutting the grass then a sting may well result. Buy a cheap head veil to wear when gardening close to a hive.

Will they bother the neighbours or pets?

There is a risk of a problem it cannot be denied. Gentle bees do not sting indiscriminately they must feel threatened and pets will be ignored unless they get very close or pick up a dying bee. The biggest danger is really from you, as a new beekeeper you may not recognise when a colony is having an occasional 'off day' and should not be manipulated further. To continue may cause aggressive bees to fly around your garden for several hours. The other hazard is to do with bees flying over washing lines and leaving 'presents' in the form of yellow dots. The siting of the hive has to be considered carefully to minimise such problems. It is good advice to talk to your neighbours first and get them on your side explaining the good that your bees will do for the environment and their garden. As a final word on this, just be aware that it is human nature to blame any insect sting someone gets locally onto your bees.

Will they mark my washing?



If the bee hive is arranged such as the bees do not fly straight towards a washing line then there should be little problem but do expect a few small spots of pollen coloured stains. It is not difficult to remove but can be annoying.

How do I set up a small apiary?

The 'ideal' location is on the edge of trees of a south facing slope with no public access or nearby paths and out of reach of cattle or horses. It should also have easy access for your vehicle. Now this 'ideal' is very seldom achieved and is used here only as an ideal reference. In some ways it's more helpful to think of what it should not be. Do not site your bees in an area that is damp such as in the middle of a wood or in a hollow, choose somewhere that is well ventilated but not sited in a wind tunnel. On the edge of a coppice can makes for a nice site. Do consider the aspects related to public access and animals. The hives should be on stands about 300-400mm/12-15 inches high and allows air movement beneath them. Set the hives no closer than one metre apart and avoid the entrances being in a straight line as this will just encourage bees to drift into other hives, a trait that will cause disease to spread easily and tend to weaken some colonies in favour of others.



*Tip: Should you wish to approach a farmer for permission to keep bees on his land, try and have some idea of where on his land might be suitable **before** asking as he will have no idea, and may suggest somewhere less favourable.*

I do not want more than one colony of bees, is that ok

As a new beekeeper you may want to keep your hobby as small as possible, and that to you means just one hive. This is a mistake and you should aim to have two colonies on the go within your second season. There are several reasons to recommend this:

1. Should your one colony die in the winter you are immediately no longer a beekeeper.
 2. Two colonies allow you to contrast and compare so you can spot their mutual strengths and weaknesses. You will learn more.
 3. Should you have a problem with one colony such as it being queen less you can easily take eggs from your other colony to test or treat it.
-

What can I paint my hives with?

Regular household paint should be avoided as they tend to seal the wood in a way that prevents the wood from 'breathing' and the inside of the hive can get damp. Although not readily available now also do not use creosote or similar highly volatile finishes.

The water-based fence products that are now readily available make ideal hive finish as they have low volatility and toxicity.

Only paint the exterior of the hive boxes as the bees are the experts at looking after the interior wooden surfaces.

Best to leave freshly painted boxes in the open to air for a few days before using them.



What colour is best

If the hives can be accessed by the public then keep the colours subdued - browns or dark greens to lessen the likelihood of them being spotted and mischief occurring. If this is not an issue, paint them any colour you like.

Am I insured

As a member of the [West Glamorgan Bee Keepers Association](#) you are covered for third party risks and product liability for a maximum of three colonies of bees through a scheme known as 'BDI' ([Bee Disease Insurance](#)). This is an independent company run by beekeepers for beekeepers. BDI is an insurance policy that gives you payment should your bees need to be destroyed due to a severe disease such as [EFB or AFB](#). It has sliding scale of charges dependant on the maximum number of colonies that you run in the season.

(Please note that if you have bees when starting your membership with us you must inform the Association secretary of how many colonies you wish to insure).

Are there any laws regarding keeping bees

There are no laws as such mentioning keeping bees in the UK and prosecutions against beekeepers have been on the grounds of 'Statutory Nuisance' "Whereby interference with the enjoyment of the neighbouring property is a prerequisite"

Parts of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, could be, and have been used against beekeepers, and this could happen in the case of 'Nuisance'.

Keeping bees on allotments has its own considerations.

I am a Vegan, is beekeeping exploitative



In my opinion no, bees are 'happiest' when they are collecting nectar. Any experienced beekeeper knows bees stuck indoors waiting for good weather are much more likely to be grouchy than a hive that is working hard gathering nectar; it's party time for them. Beekeeping is very much a synergetic arrangement where the beekeeper gives the bees a nice home, looks after their health and the ideal conditions to let the bees do what they enjoy doing most. Happily, for all, they are capable of gathering several times more nectar than they actually need or can use.

I went to the vegan web site www.vegansociety.com to try understand their opinion and got a bit annoyed by the deliberately distorted language to spin the position to their seemingly dogmatic point of view. I have copied one of the representative vegan documents and interspersed my comments between theirs. [Click here to read it.](#)
