

Top 10 Tips for the Suburban Beekeeper

1. **Successful suburban beekeepers must have an above average knowledge of beekeeping practices.** Increased knowledge of honey bees and beekeeping will improve efficiency and safety. Subscribe to beekeeping publications and keep reference books available. Enroll in local and state beekeeping organizations. Short courses are presented by local groups throughout the spring and summer months to provide hands-on experience in managing honey bees.
2. **Check for restrictions on keeping bees.** Local ordinances and homeowner covenants may limit the number or location of bee hives in a community. These may specifically address honey bees or are included in a nuisance or health regulation.
3. **Maintain gentle colonies.** Certain races of bees are more aggressive than others. If a colony becomes overly aggressive, requeening will usually improve the temperament of hive occupants.
4. **Limit the number of hives.** Most suburban areas are unable to support more than five to ten hives without a decrease in honey production and colony strength. In addition, an over populated apiary increases searching and defensive behavior in hives present.
5. **Provide water as early and close to hives as possible.** Bees need water to cool the hive and dilute honey for feeding when nectar is scarce. They are inclined to take advantage of the nearest water sources. A neighbor's bird bath, pool, fish pond, faucet, or other source of available water may attract honey bees. A shallow container near a hive with sponges, sticks, or other floating material for bees to land on is an excellent source of water.
6. **Avoid giving neighbors a reason to complain.** Disruption of a bee hive during inspections, adding or removing honey supers, or cutting grass around the hive may cause the bees to become more active. Avoid disturbing the hive when neighbors are home and likely to be outside. Carefully plan hive manipulations and execute them quickly and smoothly.
7. **Plant a hedge row in front of hives.** This will serve to force bees to fly above people's heads and keep hives concealed from sight. A flowering hedge will also provide another nectar source for foraging bees. A privacy fence is a good alternative.
8. **Have sufficient equipment of standard dimensions available in good repair.** Proper equipment is essential to enjoyable beekeeping for pleasure and profit. Suburban beekeepers often find themselves with too little equipment for the number of colonies being maintained. They may leave hives uncovered while "quickly" retrieving or assembling equipment. Exposed hives may become defensive of the brood nest and food stores.
9. **Minimize robbing activity.** Weak hives and unprotected supers, especially during hive examination and removal of surplus honey, are susceptible to robbing. This may promote increase flight activity and defensive behavior in nearby hives. Reduce entrances to weak hives to allow occupants better opportunity to defend the colony. Cover honey supers during hive examinations and honey removal to protect them for foraging bees. Avoid extracting and processing honey outside.
10. **Monitor hives for swarming behavior.** A swarm may cause considerable concern about bee stings. Simple management practices such as reversing brood boxes, splitting overpopulated hives, requeening every two years, and adding honey supers at appropriate times can prevent swarming behavior. Should a swarm occur, capture it quickly and safely.