



# GUIDELINES TO URBAN BEEKEEPING

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# Beekeeping in residential areas

Beekeeping in the suburbs is now more popular than ever before. With many households now managing a backyard hive or two it's important to ensure your bees are becoming a nuisance for your neighbors and friends and family who may visit you from time to time.

The QBA has produced the following guidelines to support recreational beekeepers and promote responsible beekeeping in the suburbs. By following these recommended guidelines your honey bees should live harmoniously with the greater community.

## Before you get your hive

### Look around your local environment

What can you offer honey bees and other pollinating insects in your garden? Bees like any other living creature, need access to food and water in order to survive. Your local plant nursery is a great place to visit to understand what grows locally in your area. Honey bees, native bees and other beneficial insects will need flora to forage on year-round, so try to look for vegetation that flowers at alternate seasons to ensure your garden is a feast for the eyes and the insects all year round.

### Provide your bees with water

Water is the essential ingredient to life. Beekeepers must ensure water is available before placing bees in your backyard. Hives should be positioned in a sunny spot with access to water from capillary moisture sources. Wet sand or gravel, the edge of a water pond or floating water plants are great options to allow your bees to access water. Providing a local water source may prevent your bees from visiting neighbouring backyards or swimming pools in search of water.

### Make enquiries with your local council

Anyone considering beekeeping in the suburbs should enquire with their local council in relation to their policy about urban beekeeping. A number of Queensland local councils have worked closely with the QBA to establish dedicated beekeeping policy in their area. Unfortunately, the greater majority of local councils are yet to adopt a formal position on keeping bees in urban areas. As the industry body for beekeeping in Queensland, the QBA is always more than happy to provide consultation to local council to support responsible urban policy planning.

## Join your local beekeeping club

Joining a beekeeping club as a member and learn from experience local mentors. It is best to experience the buzz of honey bees up close and in person to ensure you're comfortable with large populations of insects.

## Talk to your neighbours

Before you place hives in your backyard to let your neighbours know you are planning to keep bees. It is recommended that you consider sharing a bucket or two of each season's honey with your neighbours next door. Gifting a jar of honey over the fence can be a great opportunity to build neighbourhood relationships.

## Complete the BOLT course (Biosecurity On-line Training)

All beekeepers should complete the BOLT course prior to purchasing their first colony of honey bees. A key skillset to maintaining a health population is having the ability to identify pests and disease within your colony. All beekeepers must have the ability to identify endemic and exotic pests and know the steps to take to report notifiable pests and diseases. The QBA strongly recommend all beekeepers undertake the training prior to obtaining their first hive, and complete refresher training every three years. The training is free and available to anyone in Australia. Learn more about the BOLT course by visiting the QBA website [www.qbabees.org.au](http://www.qbabees.org.au)

## Register your hive

It is a requirement under the *Biosecurity Act 2014* to register your honey bees. New beekeepers must register as a biosecurity entity with Biosecurity Queensland. Registration is an easy process and is free for recreational beekeepers (beekeepers keeping hives as a hobby, not making a profit from selling honey or wax). Beekeepers will be issued with a HIN number (hive identification number) which must be clearly marked on your hive/s. It is recommended that new beekeepers contact Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23 to learn more about the requirements to register your hive.

## Sourcing your first colony

### Buying your bees

The QBA strongly recommend sourcing your first colony of honey bees from an experienced beekeeper or through your local club. Ensuring you complete a disease inspection or ask for a disease test to be completed prior to any funds exchanging hands. New beekeepers should purchase colonies during spring and source colonies that have been re-queened with a line genetically bred for gentleness, reluctance to swarm or quietness on the comb.

## Placement of your hive

Now that you're about to place your first colony of bees into your garden it is best to identify an appropriate area for the bees that will encourage them to fly across your property rather than flying directly into your neighbour's yard. In some instances, it may be necessary to place a barrier (either man-made or vegetation) to encourage the foraging bees to fly up and over the barrier to source food and water. Barriers may take form in the way of a hedge or shrub or a large piece of shade cloth attached to a trellis.

## Working your hive

Inspecting and robbing bees in urban areas can often create some alarm with neighbours as they may experience a sudden increase in bees flying within the proximity of the hive and neighbouring backyards. Bee smokers should always be used to calm and subdue the colony prior to opening the hive to complete an inspection. Beekeepers should always check fire regulations before using a smoker.

Beekeepers should avoid working honey bees when conditions are less than ideal. Cool, cloudy and rainy days are best left to activities other than tending to your bees.

Attempting to work bees on overcast and rainy days may cause stress within the colony and place the colony on guard to protect the brood and stores.

It is best practice to provide your neighbours with plenty of warning prior to working your bees. Beekeepers will often find that neighbours will be more accepting of hives if you make an effort to communicate with them.

## Hive density

Beekeeping is an infectious hobby and often beekeepers will have a natural tendency to increase the number of hives they manage as they gain experience. While beekeepers may be comfortable with having bees buzzing around their yard, your neighbours may feel threatened.

Beekeepers must always maintain respect of local council laws and their neighbours' rights by ensuring bees don't become a nuisance or possible safety risk to others. To support responsible urban beekeeping practices, the QBA has endorsed hive density limits for urban areas.

**Table 1 - Hive Density in urban areas**

<b>Allotment size</b>	<b>Maximum number of hives</b>
up to 500 m <sup>2</sup>	0
500-1000 m <sup>2</sup>	2
1000-2000 m <sup>2</sup>	5
2000-4000 m <sup>2</sup>	10
>4000 m <sup>2</sup>	Seek advice (if urban zoned)

## Working in your garden

Before starting any gardening work, it is recommended that the colony is provided with a few gentle puffs of smoke to calm and settle the bees. Mowers and whipper snippers may upset the bees causing the colony to enter protection mode and sting any operators of garden equipment.

## Bees and lights

As honey bees use the light of the sun to assist in navigation to food and water sources, bees may also be attracted to light sources at dusk and during the night hours. Fluorescent lights are highly attractive to bees so placing a barrier at the entrance of the hive (similar barrier to encourage a higher flight path) may be necessary to prevent bees from upsetting any alfresco dining/entertaining areas.

## Swarming

Beekeepers have a biosecurity obligation to reduce and limit the potential for swarming. Although swarming is a natural instinct for honey bees and occurs generally in spring and early summer, it must be prevented where possible. Beekeepers should undertake spring hive maintenance to reduce the chances of swarms.

Common practices such as:

- requeening with a line not predisposed to swarming
- increase the number of cells available for worker eggs to prevent overcrowding
- remove queen cells by inspecting your colony every 7-10 days in good weather
- prevent hives from overheating by using ventilated lids and bottom boards
- replace the a few frames of old brood comb with fresh foundation.

New beekeepers should seek the support from an experienced mentor. As previously suggested, consider joining your local club to find to learn more about general husbandry.

If your hive happens to swarm the beekeeper is responsible for the swarm and should make every endeavour to capture the swarm as soon as physically possible. It should never be assumed that swarms found in the vicinity of managed hives have originated from the managed hives. Swarms may originate from adjacent colonies or from feral/unmanaged colonies.

All beekeepers should maintain stock of spare honey supers with bottom frames, lid and a hive lock in the event that bees may swarm and to facilitate the capture of the swarm.

Regardless of their origin, swarms should be collected whenever possible and rehomed in a managed hive.

## Beekeeping Supplies

Where possible, support Australian owned and made beekeeping supply stores and manufactures. Beekeeping supply stores are a great source of local knowledge and may assist you in getting all the essential components of beekeeping ready prior to obtaining your first hive.

Beekeepers should only source pure Australian made beeswax to use as foundation in frames and be wary of cheap and nasty imitations that may be contaminated with paraffin.

The QBA urge all beekeeper to buy Australian where and when possible. Australian made beekeeping supplies and components are often high quality and reliable lasting through the test of time.

## Listen and learn

All new beekeepers are encouraged to take every opportunity to extend their knowledge when it comes to beekeeping. As recreational beekeeping has increased in popularity during recent years, new beekeepers may be tempted to access educational materials and online tools through the internet and other social media platforms. Whilst connecting with likeminded beekeepers in social forums may prove fruitful at times, sourcing beekeeping advice from other online sources may be detrimental to both your honey bees and your experience as a beekeeper.

Due to Australia's unique and diverse climate, the art and skill necessary to maintain honey bee colonies differs from other continents and climatic zones. Beekeeping in the suburbs of Queensland is largely a year-round recreational activity and colonies must be managed throughout the year.

The QBA strongly suggests new beekeepers explore Australian publications, websites, and on-line learning to extend their understanding of honey bee husbandry.

The QBA has published a list of useful books, websites and courses under the 'education' page on our website. Alternatively, clubs also offer a library of useful resources to build

## Help

A common saying in the honey bee industry is *ask a few beekeepers a question and get a dozen different answers*. Beekeeping is an age-old tradition with skill and wisdom being passed from generation to generation with beekeepers differing in opinion when it comes to a wide variety of subjects. Ultimately, the beekeeping community is welcoming, friendly and is keen to share knowledge with newcomers to beekeeping. So, join a local club and be a part of the buzz.