

To All Potential Beekeepers,

I offer this insight for anyone thinking about taking up the art and science of keeping honey bees. These amazing little insects are a wonder of nature and truly fascinating to work with and learn about. However, beekeeping is no longer the casual endeavor it used to be before the importation of tracheal mites, varroa mites, and African small hive beetles. All of these, along with the agricultural and turf management chemicals used on a broad basis across much of our landscape, have a negative impact upon the health and success of honey bees, making them more vulnerable to decline and die off than ever before.

Like raising any other kind of livestock, to successfully maintain honey bees requires time, effort, plus attention to the health and condition of the honey bees on a regular basis. As a beginner beekeeper one should be prepared to open and inspect your colonies once a week from early spring until mid-fall; feeding your bees more often than that when needed. Careful attention must be paid to the development of the colony, the status and productivity of the queen, the level of stores the bees are able to bring in and maintain, the presence of hive beetles, recognizing the signs of disease and treating accordingly, and of utmost importance, monitoring and suppressing varroa mites.

The start-up costs vary depending upon if you are starting with packaged honey bees vs. nucs and various equipment options; but can range between \$600 - \$800 for the necessary gear, honey bees, and one complete Langstroth hive setup. Having two colonies to compare against each other and share colony resources is beneficial for anyone but in particular for a beginner beekeeper. No additional beekeeping gear is required to maintain a second colony, only the additional cost of the honey bees and the hive which together may range from about \$425 to \$500.

Keeping honey bees is not like setting up a bird house in the back yard only to relax and enjoy the subjects of your interest as they survive unfettered on their own. As a beginning beekeeper you will need to assimilate a lot of new information and develop new skills. Beekeeping requires the application of knowledge, effort, analysis, focused attention and follow up. But if you like to be outside, propagating things, rolling up your sleeves to accomplishing a task, and learning about the natural world - this could be one of the best things you have ever done in your life. I can attest to that from my own experience.

Regards,

Mark Antunes
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