

Illinois Beekeeping Best Management Practices

Illinois State Beekeepers Association

March 2018

INTRODUCTION

Beekeeping has become increasingly popular. Responsible management is therefore necessary. Under the Illinois Bees and Apiaries Act, the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDoA) inspects honeybee colonies as a service to the beekeeping industry. The purpose of the inspections is to determine the general health of honeybee colonies. During the course of an inspection, IDoA Apiary Inspectors closely examine beehives to detect diseases and pests and to provide advice on needed treatments. Inspections are provided by the Illinois Department of Agriculture. To access more information concerning the Illinois Bees and Apiary Program, go to <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Insects/Bees/Pages/default.aspx>

The Act also **requires** beekeepers to register their colonies with the IDoA. Registration is as simple as completing a brief one-page form and mailing it to the Illinois Department of Agriculture, State Fairgrounds, P.O. Box 19281, Springfield, IL 62794-9281. A registration certificate is provided to beekeepers who register with the IDOA. There is also no charge for registering honeybee colonies with the IDoA. To download or open a PDF version of the registration form, go to the Beekeeper Registration Form link on the Bees and Apiary Program webpage link listed above or go to the below link to directly access the form. <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Insects/Bees/Documents/beekeep.pdf>

BEST PRACTICES

Education

The first and most critical step in responsible beekeeping is education. All beekeepers should have a basic understanding of honeybee biology and basic beekeeping methods. The Illinois State Beekeepers Association (ISBA) also encourages all beekeepers to join the ISBA as well as a local association affiliated with ISBA. We strongly suggest that new beekeepers take a beginning beekeeping course and read several different beekeeping guides. Many local associations offer honeybee classes and/or will mentor beekeepers. Beekeepers should stay informed of recommended changes in beekeeping practices, threats to honeybee health and government regulations.

Colony Temperament/Queens

A colony's temperament is determined by its queen's characteristics. Any colony exhibiting unusually defensive behavior (stinging or attempting to sting without provocation) or an excessive swarming tendency should be requeened as soon as possible.

Beekeepers should evaluate their queens on a regular basis for performance and hive gentleness. Only queens of European origin should be used. Queens should only be obtained from the most reliable sources.

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Hive Placement

Beekeepers should comply with all homeowner association and local ordinances and regulations pertaining to beekeeping. Correct placement of hives is a very important consideration for responsible beekeeping. In urban and suburban settings, hives should be placed in a quiet area of the lot and not directly against a neighboring property unless a fence or dense plant barrier of four feet or higher forms the property boundary. Hives should be kept as far away as possible from roads, sidewalks and rights of way. Flight paths into the hive should remain within the owner's lot. Barriers, including fencing, hedges and shrubs more than four feet high may be used to redirect the bees' flight pattern.

Beekeepers are encouraged to post signs to alert neighbors and passersby to the presence of their hives; generally, it is best to place such signs so that they are only in view when the public would otherwise be able to view the hives.

Hive Management

Beekeepers should take into account that weather conditions influence bee behavior and should perform hive manipulations as quickly as possible with minimum disturbance to the bees.

Water Source

Beekeepers should ensure bees have access to water before locating them in their yard. Bees prefer a sunny place with surface moisture, for example wet sand or gravel or the edge of a birdbath. In very hot weather, bees require a large amount of water to maintain temperature and humidity within the hive.

Swarming

Swarming is natural honeybee behavior. Two primary causes of swarming are congestion and poor ventilation in the hive. To avoid these conditions, beekeepers should consider:

- Brood chamber manipulation
- Colony division
- Addition of supers for brood rearing and honey storage
- Replacement of old or failing queens

These and other swarm management practices are explained in detail in most good beekeeping textbooks.

Robbing Behavior

When nectar is scarce, honeybees may rob honey from other hives which makes them appear more defensive. Under such conditions, beekeepers should work hives for only short periods of time. Exposed honey outdoors often encourages robbing. All empty hive equipment should be removed or securely sealed. Areas used for honey extraction should be bee-proofed to prevent robbing situations.

Disease Control

There are a number of honeybee diseases and pests which cause concern for beekeepers. American Foulbrood is extremely contagious; beekeepers should be very cautious about mixing hive equipment and purchasing used equipment for this reason. It is incumbent on beekeepers to manage all disease and pests, including parasitic mites, to ensure colony health and honey quality.

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Aggressive Colonies

Any beekeeper who witnesses unusually defensive behavior should take the following steps:

- Contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture Apiary Inspector for your area <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Insects/Bees/Pages/IDA-Apiary-Inspectors.aspx> or the IDoA's Apiary Inspection Supervisor at 217/782-6297.
- Requeen immediately with certified European stock
- Monitor requeened hive for continued defensiveness

Summary

Treating all honey bees with respect is a fundamental pillar of beekeeping as honey bees are indispensable and important to the human food supply.

DISCLAIMER

This document is and always will be a work in progress, intended for regular update and revision. It offers guidelines for responsible beekeeping in the State of Illinois but is not intended to provide legal advice.