



# THERE'S A BUZZ

## about beekeeping in Wyoming

The hobbyist beekeeper can learn to wrangle his or her honeybees into producing one of nature's sweetest treats

*By Justina Russell*

When hearing the buzz of a bee or seeing one drifting in the breeze, do you instinctively run for cover, or do you watch in amazement as the tiny creature floats from place to place going about its daily rituals?

If the latter, beekeeping may be a suitable hobby to consider. Whether on a farm, ranch, or small acreage property, keeping a few honeybee colonies in the backyard can provide numerous benefits and countless hours of enjoyment.

### **Benefits of Raising Honeybees**

Honeybees pollinate and increase production of fruit trees, vegetable gardens, crops, and wild plants. Honeybees are believed to pollinate, in part or in whole, more than 100 agricultural crops within the United States, accounting for approximately one-third of the foods we consume daily. In Wyoming, honeybees are instrumental in pollinating sunflowers, yellow sweet clover, and a variety of

fruit trees found scattered throughout the state.

Outside of pollination, bees provide a wealth of other resources. Honey is the most obvious, but products derived from beeswax such as cosmetics, candles, inks, polishes, and paints are also prominent in today's consumer markets. Royal jelly (queen's food) and pollen collected from beehives are used as health food supplements because of their high vitamin and mineral contents.

### **Before You Start**

Anyone wishing to own bees in Wyoming must be aware of pertinent Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) statutes. In general, beekeepers must register hives with the WDA by April 1; failure to register can result in hefty fines. Hobbyist beekeepers can keep up to five hives before having to pay a registration fee.

Accurate legal descriptions of hive locations must be provided so the WDA can determine if newly established hives might interfere with

proper feeding and honey flow at existing apiary sites or if they have the potential to transfer bee diseases and parasites.

Specific state regulations are covered in detail at <http://legisweb.state.wy.us/statutes/statutes.aspx?file=titles/Title11/T11CH7.htm>. Check with your local city or county government to see if local ordinances also apply.

### **Getting Started**

Purchasing a kit is one of the easiest ways to get started. Buy an all-inclusive beekeeping kit, which retails for \$100 to \$300. Kits contain everything needed to start the first colony of bees except the bees themselves. Packages containing 2 to 3 pounds of bees and a mated queen are ordered and shipped separately from kits in early spring.

### **Location and Hive Placement**

A good rule of thumb for a site is anywhere a tent might be placed: level, close to water, out of the wind,

# ITEMS TYPICALLY IN A KIT

One or two **hive bodies**. Hive bodies are the standard boxes that make up a beehive. Hive body, brood chamber, super or bee box all mean the same thing – a housing structure for bees. The difference in name comes from how each is used.



**Honey Super-box** – Placed on top of the brood chamber where harvestable honey is produced. Comes in two sizes: shallow (5 3/8 inches) and medium (6 5/8 inches). A third, small size exists (4 3/4 inches) but is used only for the production of honeycomb. Honey supers are shorter than hive bodies because smaller boxes are lighter and easier to handle when full of honey. Super simply refers to their superior placement in the hive configuration – above the brood chamber.



**Brood chamber** – The tallest compartment in a hive is 9 5/8 inches tall and is reserved for housing the queen and “immature bees” – the brood; this box is also referred to as the deep super, brood nest, or hive chamber.



**Feeder** – Many styles available; used to feed a 1:1 water/sugar syrup mixture when nectar not available; also used to feed water in summer months.



**Foundation** – Sheets of hexagonal, imprinted beeswax used to encourage bees to build a uniform comb within frames.



**Hive tool** – Used to open hives and remove frames without damaging wood. Note: Bees fill gaps in hives with propolis or “bee glue” making it necessary to pry apart hive components during hive inspection and harvest.

etc. If people would find the site suitable to inhabit, then bees probably will be happy to camp there, too.

Bees are most active in full sunlight so place hives where they will receive adequate exposure to the sun to maximize nectar collection and the honey crop. However, like a pet, bees need light shade during the hottest part of the day. They also need a steady supply of fresh water. A hive of bees will use a quart a day or more in hot weather. Installing a birdbath close to the hive is an easy way to supply bees with a reliable source

of water. Place blocks of wood or corks inside the bath so bees have a place to rest while drinking; bees can drown while foraging for water in large basins.

Hives should be raised off the ground with cinder or wood blocks to allow airflow and to discourage predators like skunks. Raising the hives is not just to allow predators to pass underneath. Small mammals are less likely to raid a hive when they are forced to rise up on their hind legs and expose their bellies; thus, raising hives is a good deterrent for

animals like skunks and raccoons. A large rock or brick on the top of a hive will help keep top covers secure.

## Hive Maintenance

The beekeeper can employ techniques to ensure development of a strong colony with ample honey production. Carbohydrate and protein supplementation, disease and pest mitigation, and winter hive management are essential to achieving maximum colony numbers in time for the major nectar flow time periods.



**Inner and outer covers** – Two-part system used for weatherproofing a hive



**Entrance reducer** – A small piece of wood placed at the entrance of a hive protects a weak colony from being robbed of honey by a stronger colony, reduces drafts during winter months, and prevents small animals like mice from entering.



**Frames** – Square, wooden structures designed to support a comb of beeswax.



**Veiled bee hat** – Large veil that drapes over a plastic helmet or hooded bee suit (full bee suit used to protect entire body from stings).



**Gloves** – Leather with cotton sleeves all the way to the elbow.



**Bee smoker** – A small fire container with bellows used to puff smoke on bees during harvest. Smoke produces a feeding response in bees; when a bee has a full belly, it is less likely to sting.



The timing of prime nectar flow depends upon a specific location and can vary from year to year, but in Wyoming it typically begins in late spring to early summer and continues through mid- to late-summer when most flowering plants are in full bloom.

If possible, the inexperienced hobbyist is encouraged to pair with a more seasoned beekeeper when carrying out these tasks for the first time.

Becoming a successful beekeeper can be rewarding. Backyard bees provide a natural, nutritious product and can be enjoyable to watch and care for. With a little practice, the hobbyist beekeeper will soon be adept at wrangling his or her bees into producing one of nature's sweetest treats.

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