

Allotment Beekeeping



Insurance: The BBKA provides a third-party insurance scheme to all beekeepers who are paid-up members of a local beekeeping association and which in turn is affiliated to the BBKA. (Also, a beekeeper may sometimes be a direct member of the BBKA.) This insurance is in respect of their own beekeeping activities and has an upper limit of liability of £5M. The BBKA issues membership cards to all such beekeepers and its headquarters can confirm quickly if a beekeeper is known to them and is insured. Other beekeepers may need to prove that they have the required degree of cover from other sources.

Qualifications: The BBKA operates a well-established national system of assessments and examinations for beekeeping skills at a number of levels. The starting point is the 'Basic Assessment', which all beekeepers are eligible to take after they have kept bees for one full year or had equivalent experience. If you need to have any evidence of competence, this is an appropriate starting point. Again, the BBKA can confirm the qualifications of any beekeeper.

Spraying and pesticides: Honey bees are very vulnerable to the effects of insecticides. You should ensure that any applications under your control are made with due consideration of the bees and that other allotment holders are also aware of the correct procedures.

DEFRA Officials: Honey bees are susceptible to a number of rare but serious infectious diseases. Some of these are 'notifiable' to DEFRA, under the same general regulations as other livestock diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease in cattle. In these instances, the Regional Bee Inspectors (RBIs) and their assistants have statutory powers to access hives to deal with disease and to survey the extent of the spread of disease from other colonies. They can issue 'standstill' notices to prevent colonies being moved and 'destruction' notices which may require the affected colonies to be burnt and buried **in-situ**. Please co-operate as fully as you can, the need may be urgent.

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To the Allotment Manager

On behalf of the British Beekeepers Association (the BBKA), thank you for considering the possibility of bees being kept on your allotment. As I am sure you are aware, honey bees play a vital part in crop pollination, not just for our food but also for that of many other plants and animals in the ecosystem. Also, most of us like honey...

The increasing prevalence of diseases in bees means that they need more and more support from man to help them survive. Feral colonies are short-lived because of untreated mite infestations and so managed colonies of honey bees are vital to us all.

The following is intended to answer questions that you may have about bees and 'your' beekeeper. More information can be obtained from the BBKA.

Location of Hives: Ideally, bees like a hive with an entrance facing south-east, towards the rising sun. This helps them to become active earlier in the day. Also, they like the aspect to be generally open to help flight paths and not under any dripping vegetation. Bees are very precise about their flight paths in order to save their energy and do not generally 'mill about'. If their flight path is a problem (e.g. it may cross a footpath) the bees can be made to fly about head height by the use of simple screening, such as is used for windbreaks.

How many Hives: The number of hives (and the size of each) will change during the year; this is part of normal beekeeping. The minimum number will be in late winter and the maximum in late summer. There is no particular upper limit on the number that can be kept in one place, provided the bees can find forage over a distance of up to 5 km and the beekeeper has the time to attend to them.

Swarming: All honey bees try to swarm; this is a crucial reproductive activity for any social insect. Your beekeeper should be aware of how to deal with this.

In general, an inspection of each hive is required at least once a week during the 'swarming season', which is roughly April to July in the UK, although an experienced beekeeper will be watching for signs at all times of the year. You should ensure that your beekeeper is aware of this need and is able to carry it out (for instance, what will he or she do during holidays?). There are a number of swarm control techniques which a competent beekeeper will be aware of.

If and when swarming does occur, despite the best efforts of the beekeeper, there is no need for other allotment holders to be concerned. Despite the 'busy-ness' of the bees, the swarm will settle down in an hour or so and can be re-captured if it is safe to do so. Bees are NOT additionally aggressive when they are swarming. (By the way, the so-called 'killer bees', more correctly called Africanised honey bees, DO NOT OCCUR in the UK.)

Water: Bees need water, just like any other living creature. They like 'damp things', such as pond margins, as they can drown in deep water. However, once bees have found a source of water that they like, they will continue to use it. Making them change if this is inconvenient may require co-operation of other allotment holders to temporarily cover water or some other intervention. Bees are also attracted to salty water, so the 'sweat of the brow' can also attract them to other people, in extreme conditions.

Unattended Hives: Beekeepers should not use allotments as storage space for equipment that does not contain bees (used but exposed beekeeping equipment can spread disease). No wax comb should be left exposed in an apiary; it must be stored in a bee-proof way.

Beekeepers should not put colonies of bees known to be of an aggressive temperament onto allotments. If you suspect that this is occurring, then the beekeeper should be asked to remedy the situation immediately.

It is a good idea to ensure that all hive equipment has some sort of identification mark placed on it by the beekeeper and that reliable contact information for the beekeeper(s) is available at a known communal point on the allotment, perhaps in a tea-hut or suchlike.

Vandalism: Please try and ensure that long objects, such as stout poles and ladders are secured. Our experience is that these may be used to push over hives from a safe distance.

Stings: In general, bees will only sting if provoked to defend either their brood or the honey they have collected. However, several items can increase the risk of stings to other people on the allotment:

- bees do not like the smell of beer, gin etc., especially on people
- leather clothing such as watchstraps or motorcycle 'leathers' upset bees because of the associated animal smell
- bees regard dark hairy clothing as a threat; it looks like a bear to them
- many soaps, shampoos and clothing treated with fabric conditioner smell very like flowers and attract bees
- bees regard sudden movements as a sign of aggression. To deal with a troublesome bee, move slowly towards a hedge or close to another tree. Eventually the bee will go away
- bees regard glasses, jewellery and glinting metal (e.g. watch straps) as substitute eyes and will try to attack them as a first option.

First Aid for stings: Firstly, the sting should be scraped out sideways, to avoid pressing the poison sac and getting a full dose. Stings may cause swelling and itching for several days, this is normal. Any sign of dizziness is more serious; consult your GP. In the case of sudden fainting/collapse (or stings inside the nose or mouth) administer first aid and call an ambulance. Stings near eyes should receive prompt medical examination.

Children who are stung should be observed for an hour or two to make sure there are no adverse effects. Remove rings etc. if stung on the hand.

Wasps and bees: These are often confused, but wasps nest in the ground or in open, making 'paper' nests in sheds or suspended from bushes. Wasps can be a nuisance to bees, as they rob hives of honey. Care should be taken in the destruction of any wasps' nest near bees, as there is a risk of the transfer of pesticide to the bee colony, which will harm it. Use a licensed pest controller to deal with wasps' nests. Wasps are valuable insect pest predators in spring and summer.