

2011 FLBC Beginning Beekeeping

Notes for the session: Equipment

Not much is written in stone. One deep or two for brood, all supers on at the start of the season or one at a time, plastic versus wax, comb honey or extracted... The choices seem endless, and everyone has an opinion. Below are the essentials, though there are variations.

Essentials (for two hives)

2 - 4 hive bodies

- usually deeps, but may be mediums or even shallows;
- may be 10 frame or 8 frame;

4 or more supers for honey

- may be deeps, mediums, or shallows
- may be 8 or 10 frame

Frames (deep, medium, or shallow, in the number needed to fill your boxes, plus some extra)

- may be one-piece plastic, plastic inserted into wood
- plastic may be waxed (preferable) or unwaxed
- may be Plasticel, which is "pre-drawn" for the bees

Bottom boards

- solid or screened
- wood or styrofoam

Telescoping and inner covers

- may use "migratory covers," but most hobbyists don't

Stands

- Cinderblocks, railroad ties, fancy plastic from Dadant... they all work
- The wooden bottom board/landing board combos look good, but they aren't high enough on their own, and the wood rots fast on damp ground.

Entrance reducer

- One for each hive. They often come with the bottom board or other hive part. I like the metal ones ("universal entrance reducer"), but the plain wooden ones are fine.

Feeder and feeding

- Boardman-type feeders usually come with the "beginners package" sold by supply houses. They hold a quart, and can encourage robbing. If you have one or two hives, and don't mind refilling them every day, they're ok.
- Get a hive top for easier feeding, if you can. They hold more.
- Pollen supplement can be useful in spring and fall; consider buying some, if you have the cash to spare.

Hive tool

- Buy a few. They don't cost much, and are easily lost.

Protection

- Veil--type is up to you
- Anything else--gloves, jacket, etc. is optional, depending on your budget and comfort

being stung

Smoker

- For only a few hives, the smallest, cheapest one will do. If you have the money, by all means buy a bigger one with a heat guard, etc.

Something to hold all your junk

- I use an old tool bag to hold my hive tool, newspaper for starting the smoker, lighters, and other odds and ends.

Reference material

- Get a good reference book or two, and bookmark a couple of reputable sites on the Internet for asking questions. Beesource.com is a good place to start. Everyone has their favorite books, but *The ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture* is a great reference. Less weighty and expensive are Dadant's *First Lessons in Beekeeping* and *Beekeeping for Dummies*.

Extracting

Members of the FLBC can borrow the club extractor. Given that good extractors are expensive, borrowing for your first season or two makes sense. You might also decide to use the "crush and strain" method (crush unwired comb into a strainer, and let it drip into a bucket). That costs nothing but the wax, but is slow and messy. You might also choose to make cut comb honey rather than extract; that requires just a sharp knife and space to drain the comb.

If you plan to extract, however, plan on buying:

- One of the many ways to get bees away from the honey: Porter bee escapes (cheapest), triangle escape board (more expensive, depending on the number of hives), a fume board and Bee Quick, or use a leaf blower, or...
- A "cold" uncapping knife. This is a large, serrated knife with an offset handle specially made for uncapping frames of honey. A new one is around \$30. There are electric versions ("hot" uncapping knives) and other variations, but the cold knife works very well and costs much less.
- An uncapping fork: this is a small (and cheap) tool used to uncap cells missed by the large knife. Some small beekeepers do all their uncapping with these, but I like the knife. A cheap uncapping fork is a few dollars.
- An uncapping tub: a plastic (food grade!) tub sized to hold frames after they are uncapped, with a draining rack in the bottom (or other method of separating chunks of wax from honey) and a spigot. They are ridiculously expensive, for what they are, about \$100 new.
- Strainers: unless you want to have honey with bee parts and wax in it, you'll want to at least strain it. A set of plastic strainers runs about \$15 or so. Spring for the metal ones, if you have the extra money, about \$40 new.
- Bottling bucket(s): Store your honey in these food-grade buckets, with or without spigots. How many depends on how many hives you have. Each one holds about 60 lbs of honey (5 gallons). For about \$30, you can get a bucket with spigot and a set of filters, or about \$10 for a bucket with no spigot.
- Jars. You need to put your honey into something. You can use old spaghetti sauce jars, or buy bottles from a supplier. It's up to you!
- Labels. Not really necessary, but you'll want them, eventually. Suppliers sell them, or you can make your own, if you have a computer and printer.

Not necessary, but nice to have

A spare nuc box

- You can do a quick increase, if you have a colony with an exploding population, and

either increase your apiary, or combine them back in the fall. Or sell it.

- I use an empty nuc for hanging frames as I work, or for sitting down to watch the colony.

Queen excluder

- People debate their use all the time: do they exclude just the queens, or are workers reluctant to pass? Still, nice to have them on hand.

Queen catcher

- A little plastic "catcher" to hold the queen, if you happen to spot her, while you do hive manipulation. It's one way of making sure she isn't injured, especially during more lengthy or complicated hive manipulations.

Drone brood frames

- Either plastic one-piece (colored green so they're easy to spot) or wax--if you want to do Integrated Pest Management by tearing out drone cells to lessen varroa loads

Pollen supplement

- More and more articles recommend feeding bees not just syrup, but pollen supplement (like Dadant's Brook Builder or Megabee) spring and fall, to make sure the bees are well-nourished.

What about those beginner's kits all the supply stores sell?

- They often include things you don't want (Boardman feeder, gloves, smoker fuel) and lack things that are very nice to have (a good hive top feeder, a better quality veil or jacket, etc.). I would take a hard look at the kit, add up the price of what I really want versus buying the kit plus needed extras, and see if it's worth it.

Where to buy equipment (not an exhaustive list, and in alphabetical order)

Better Bee <http://www.betterbee.com/>

Brushy Mountain <http://www.brushymountainbeefarm.com/>

Dadant and Sons, Inc. <http://www.dadant.com/> (check for locations; they have one in Waverly, about 40 miles from Ithaca)

Mann Lake Ltd. <http://mannlakeltd.com/>

Walter T. Kelley Company <http://kelleybees.com/>