

Keeping Bees in your Garden or Allotment

Many beekeepers keep bees in their own garden, and this can be very convenient, but there are a number of issues you need to consider as to whether it will work for you. A large garden in the countryside is ideal, but if you have close neighbours there can be problems.

As is well known, bees can sting, and will do so when they feel the need, but this is defensive behaviour and normally occurs only in an area around the hive. Not all bee colonies are the same in this regard - some can be very docile and rarely sting, others will sting you at the slightest opportunity, and at considerable distance from the hive. Hives need to be opened regularly for inspection and other manipulations which disturbs the bees and increases the number of bees in the air, creating a higher chance of someone being stung. Excessive "stinginess" is a genetic issue and can be solved by re-queening the colony with a good quality queen, but this takes time to organise and take effect.

If your hives are located near people or domestic animals you must keep docile bees, and the hives must be suitably sited to ensure the bees' flight paths do not bother your family and neighbours.

Bees need water at certain times and a source should be provided. They might also take water from animal water troughs, children's paddling pools, bird baths, wet washing (especially the neighbours') and any unlikely source, increasing the risk of an accidental stinging.

Bees defecate on the wing and the end product may be found on cars, washing hung out to dry, etc., which can be a source of great irritation. It's a particular problem in early spring when bees are emerging from a long spell in the hive after a cold winter.

Some allotments allow bees to be kept, but hives need to be carefully sited and placed in a remote corner of the field with due regard for other plot holders and neighbours.

If you feel that your garden or allotment is not suitable there are usually sites available in the locality. The Association may be able to help find one. A good apiary site is level, has available forage within a one mile radius, has some shelter from wind and sun, is not excessively damp or shaded, not in a frost pocket or liable to flood, and has good access for you but not for the general public.

Useful Pointers

Only keep bees in your garden if it is suitable – ask advice from experienced beekeepers.

Place the hives out of sight if possible, and give consideration to the bees' likely flight paths with regard to people, animals, laundry, cars etc. A fence or hedge can be used for concealing the hives and sending the bees on a higher flight path above head height.

Do not place hives near roads and footpaths.

Protect hives from livestock and dogs with suitable fencing.

Avoid opening hives when neighbours are likely to be using their gardens.

Aggressive colonies should be relocated at least 3 miles away to a site away from people.

A gift of honey rarely placates an angry neighbour.