

12 Most Common Mistakes New Beekeepers Make

1. Incorrect use of the smoker

- a. Rule of thumb is: "Little, Often"
- b. Too much smoke will aggravate the bees
- c. Too little smoke will not calm the bees
- d. Smoke must be cool – white colour

2. Opening the hive in the wrong weather

- a. Do not open the hive in rainy or overly windy weather
- b. Do not open the hive if the barometer shows a low
- c. Best time is a hot, sunny day when the bees are very busy

3. Over robbing

- a. It is tempting to take any honey you find in the hive, however, if you over-rob (hard rob) you will send the colony backwards
- b. The colony requires one frame of honey per week – so if there is no new nectar flow, you must leave enough honey in the hive for the colonies requirements.
- c. Do not rob honey frames unless they have been 90% minimum capped off

4. Over or under manipulating

- a. If you are pulling frames out of the hive every other day, you are stressing the bees.
- b. Each time you manipulate the frames, you are pulling the bees' house to pieces and they need to spend time repairing the damage and re-gluing the spaces.
- c. Leaving too long between inspections means the bees will be angrier and there will be burr comb to deal with. Removing burr comb causes honey to run throughout the hive, leaving a mess for the bees to clean up. Bees can drown if covered in honey.
- d. Leaving too long between inspections also means that your colony is not used to you, your pheromone or having the hive opened and exposed.
- e. When your colony is at **nucleus** build up stage, it is fine to do a quick inspection weekly (as you will want to do when you first get your bees). Once the colony has built up to full size box with super, you can space inspections of the **super** around the 3 week lifecycle of the worker bee and inspect each (eg) month/6 weeks.
- f. You must inspect the **brood box** a minimum of 3 times a year (pre-wet; post-wet and end winter). If you suspect any decline in population, you should check the brood box for the queen's laying pattern and the presence of any disease or pests.
- g. It is important to rotate old, black frames from the brood box regularly – this assists in keeping wax moth at bay and also gives the queen full sized cells to lay in (the cells get smaller each time a bee is raised in them and over time, the bees will not develop to full size)

5. Not checking for pests and diseases

- a. If you are not checking regularly for pests and diseases, you may find a problem and it will be too late to intervene.
- b. Small Hive Beetle can slime out a hive in a couple of weeks if not attended to.
- c. Each hive inspection should also include looking for:
 - i. Small hive beetle
 - ii. Wax moth
 - iii. Chalkbrood
 - iv. American Foulbrood
 - v. European Foulbrood

6. Splitting before time

- a. Many beginner beekeepers get very excited as the colony builds up (a good queen can lay up to 1500 eggs per day) and want to split the colony straight away.
- b. Splitting the colony is a great way to build up your colonies, however, splitting at the wrong time can lead to loss of both colonies.
- c. Splitting from the Mother Colony necessarily weakens it and it will require time to build up again.
- d. There are many methods for splitting colonies so please get some advice before your first attempt.

7. Forgetting to provide water

- a. It is an absolute MUST to provide a water source for your bees.
- b. You do not want them to decide your kitchen tap or your neighbours swimming pool is their water source, so have a water source in place before you take your bees home. Once the foragers have located this source, they will return to it.
- c. Make sure the water is not going to get hot – bees don't like to drink hot water
- d. Make sure there is some way for the bees to land and suck the water up – they cannot swim and need a landing pad, e.g a pot of water lilies or a basin filled with sand and water where they can land on the sand.

8. Wearing inadequate or wrong protective clothing

- a. Do not wear dark coloured clothing
- b. Do not wear strong perfumes or deodorant
- c. Make sure you are well protected from potential stings – especially your veil – bees will go for your head and face when in defence mode and they can squeeze through the smallest gap!
- d. If you get stung too often when starting out in the beekeeping world, you will inevitably feel more tension when next you inspect your hive. Bees pick up on this fear and will be more likely to sting you. This leads to a vicious cycle of more stings to you, more anxiety you feel, more fear pheromones the bees sense, more stings from the bees.

9. Crushing bees through rushed or heavy-handed handling

- a. The key is to be calm, steady and aware in all your hive manipulations.
- b. If you handle the frames roughly, or drop them back into place, it will agitate the bees, you will squash some which will send out the alarm pheromone and this will lead to stings.
- c. Do not pull frames out too quickly.
- d. Replace all frames slowly, trying not to crush any bees. You can use your smoker to displace bees from the space you are trying to fill.
- e. If the bees become seriously agitated and you need to finish your inspection quickly, replace frames and get the lid on in a timely manner and leave the bees alone for a few days. There are many reasons the colony can get overly agitated and it is better to leave them to it for another day, rather than continue with your inspection and stress them further.

10. Leaving brood comb exposed

- a. It is very important not to expose brood to the elements for any length of time.
- b. As a rule, do not leave brood frames out of the box unless absolutely required. If you are searching for the queen and need to leave frames out, place them into a spare box in the same order as you remove them. Leave the nurse bees on the frame so they can continue to keep the brood at the correct temperature and continue with their job of caring for the brood. Complete your manipulation/inspection steadily and get the frames back in place in the original box as soon as possible.
- c. Over exposure to (eg) cool temperature has the potential to kill the brood in their cells.

11. Failing to maintain record/hive diary

- a. As much as you think you will remember what is happening in your hive, it is highly recommended that you keep a hive diary.
- b. Record your observations after each inspection, including:
 - i. Honey and pollen stores
 - ii. Was the queen sighted
 - iii. Good brood or poor brood
 - iv. Pests and diseases
 - v. Notes for next inspections requirements
 - vi. How many frames you robbed and what type of frame you used to replace

12. Getting agitated when stung

- a. When you are stung (and it will happen) walk away from the hive so you do not have other bees around you.
- b. Remove the sting (do not squeeze it or you will be pushing more venom in)
- c. Smoke the area of the sting to dissipate the alarm pheromone that accompanies the sting.
- d. Do not run away or flap your arms around and definitely do not try to squash the bees landing on your body.
- e. You can apply any of the following to reduce the severity of the sting:
 - i. Aloe vera; Propolis; Honey; Stingoes or similar; Ice; Basil oil; lavender oil
 - ii. Take an anti-histamine tablet

Remember though, if you need to return to the hive to continue inspection, do not put strong scents on your skin at this stage.