

Guidelines for Safe Urban Beekeeping in Calgary

prepared by the Calgary and District Beekeepers Association, January, 2013

Disclaimer

This document offers guidelines for responsible hobby beekeeping. This is not an instructional text, and anyone interested in urban beekeeping is *strongly* urged to get involved with local beekeepers groups to take advantage of courses offered through them *and* to stay up-to-date on the ever-evolving techniques for hive management. See the references section at the end of the document for a list of local groups.

Introduction

Keeping honey bees in an urban setting requires responsible management to ensure safety and promote goodwill with neighbours. It is in everyone's best interest if beekeepers are sensitive to the public's safety and concerns. This document is intended to be a guideline for responsible honey bee management in the city of Calgary. It serves as:

- a resource for information to reinforce community confidence in the safety of beekeeping activities,
- a resource for the beekeeping community to avoid and address complaints or conflicts about beekeeping activities in Calgary,
- and a list of best management practices for anyone keeping bees within the city of Calgary.

Responsibility

Any person who keeps honey bees has the duty to ensure the maintenance of the bees in such a condition as will reasonably prevent aggressive behaviour or swarming by the bees.

Hive Registration

Anyone who keeps bees or owns beekeeping equipment anywhere in Alberta must register with Alberta Agriculture every year by June 30 (in Alberta, the Bee Year is July 1 to June 30). Registration is free. Contact the Provincial Apiculturist for Alberta (bee@gov.ab.ca) for further information about registration. Unregistered owners are subject to fines or imprisonment under the Alberta Bee Act (<http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/B02.pdf>).

Location of Hives

An appropriate honeybee flight path is one of the most important considerations to prevent your bees becoming a problem for your neighbours. The simplest way to do this is to ensure the flight path of your bees is above anyone in the surrounding area by encouraging your bees to fly higher than a tall adult (2 metres minimum).

Common techniques to help with this include directing hive entrances away from neighbouring properties and putting a fence or vegetative obstruction in front of the hive entrance to encourage the bees to fly upward as soon as they leave the hive.

Be particularly mindful of children and children's play areas when placing your hive. Families with children are far more likely to be concerned about a hive, and children are far more likely to inadvertently - or otherwise - do something that triggers a defensive response from the hive.

Ideally, hives should be kept in the backyard of your property, and consider keeping the hive inconspicuous so as to minimize the hive's visibility to curious visitors and vandals.

Number of hives

As a general guideline, there should be no more than two hives on a property that is less than 550 square metres (a standard 50x120 foot lot in Calgary), and no more than four on lots larger than 550 square metres within the city.

Water

A constant source of water must be provided at all times for your hives starting before the snow melts in the spring, and continuing late into fall. Water must be kept replenished and not allowed to run dry so the bees stay away from neighbourhood pools, bird baths, or dog dishes.

Queens

A young queen of a gentle stock is preferred, and should be obtained from reliable sources. Check with the local beekeeping groups for reliable sources of queens. You should requeen a hive if it shows signs of being aggressive.

Considerate hive management

Hive inspections and manipulations disturb the bees, so do what you can to minimize the disturbance. The judicious use of smoke can help calm the bees, as does timing your hive inspections for when:

- Field bees are out foraging
- The hive is not under stress
- The hive is in direct sunlight
- Temperatures are moderate
- Your neighbours are not out in the yard

Keep the area around your hives clean of hive scrapings and other hive debris to minimize the likelihood of attracting other bees, wasps or other unwanted visitors.

If you are going to be away for an extended period of time, arrange for someone to inspect your hives.

Swarming

Although swarming is natural honey bee behaviour, steps should be taken to discourage swarming in urban settings. Effective swarm prevention practices include:

- Regular inspections for indication of swarming
- Properly timed increases in the space available to the hive
- Splitting the hive (and keeping spare equipment on hand in case you need to split).
- Avoid using swarm cells as a source of queens when splitting
- Brood chamber manipulation to make sure the queen has room to lay
- Ensuring adequate ventilation in the hive

If a swarm is seen, immediate efforts should be made to collect the swarm. Contact one of the local beekeeping groups if you need assistance.

Disease Control

A primary responsibility for beekeepers is to properly manage disease and pests, including parasitic mites, to ensure hive health, honey quality and to prevent cross-contamination. All beekeepers must be able to recognize and deal with several honey bee diseases and pests, some of which are extremely contagious to other bees.

There are many approaches to disease and pest management, and techniques are evolving quickly. Getting involved with the beekeepers groups in Calgary is one of the best ways to stay on top of the latest disease and pest management techniques.

Liability

For peace of mind, you are encouraged to carry liability insurance to cover accidents related to your beekeeping activities. Insurance is available to members of the Alberta Beekeeper's Commission. See the Resources section below for more information.

Resources

A few helpful resources in the Calgary include:

Calgary Beekeeping Groups:

- Calgary & District Beekeepers Association: <http://www.calgarybeekeepers.com>
- Apiaries and Bees for Communities (ABC): <http://www.backyardbees.ca/>

In addition to the local beekeepers groups, courses are also offered through Alberta Agriculture (email bee@gov.ab.ca for information)

Alberta Provincial Apiculturalist

- The Provincial Apiculturalist for Alberta is Dr. Medhat Nasr (bee@gov.ab.ca).

Alberta Beekeepers Commission

This organization offers many resources, including the option for members to purchase liability insurance.

- <http://www.albertabeekeepers.org/>