

Insurance

The BBKA provides third-party insurance cover to all beekeepers who are fully paid-up members. This insurance cover is in respect of their own beekeeping activities. Your beekeeping allotment holder should be able to show a valid receipt for membership of the BBKA together with a certificate of insurance.

Be aware that if they cease to be a BBKA member they may not be insured. Other non BBKA beekeepers may need to prove that they have the required degree of cover from other sources.

DEFRA Officials

As with all livestock, honey bees are susceptible to diseases, some of which are more serious than others and may be highly infectious. 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 DEFRA Bee Inspectors have statutory powers to inspect hives, deal with disease and to survey the extent of the spread of disease from other colonies. They can issue 'standstill' notices to prevent colonies and equipment 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.



General Points

This leaflet is one of a series intended to help beekeepers and non-beekeepers and is available to download from the BBKA website.

Information is updated regularly.

www.bbka.org.uk

This leaflet supersedes L015 (edition 2012).

DISCLAIMER

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Allotment Beekeeping

To the Allotment Manager

On behalf of the British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) thank you for considering the possibility of honey bees being kept on your allotment. As you are probably aware they play a vital part in pollination, not just for our food but also for many other plants. They also produce food and most of us like honey.

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

The following is intended to answer questions you may have about bees and 'your' beekeeper(s).



More information can be obtained from the BBKA.

Who should be allowed to keep bees on an allotment?

Honey bees are considered to be livestock and as such those looking after bees should have some training prior to acquiring a colony. Ideally beekeepers on an allotment site will have undertaken an introductory course and have a mentor to help them develop their skills. Many allotment associations and local councils insist that beekeepers wishing to look after bees on a public site have at least a BBKA Basic Certificate.

Location of Hives

Ideally, a suitable site would be fairly open, light and airy. To avoid being a nuisance, bees can be forced to fly above head height by surrounding the hives with hedging, solid fencing or simple screening such as is used for windbreaks.

Bees are very precise about their flight paths in order to save their energy and do not generally go off course. It is a good idea for all bees to be kept in one designated area, rather than spread around the site. A secure site is preferable with clear signage indicating the presence of bees and contact numbers of responsible beekeepers who can be contacted if there are concerns.

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.

How many Hives?

In a normal situation there is no particular upper limit on the number that can be kept in one place but on an allotment it is reasonable for the number to be kept at a manageable level.

Each situation will be different and it may make sense for there to be an agreed upper limit but beware there are some times during the summer when it is part of normal management techniques to temporarily increase colony numbers.

Risk Assessment

It is good practice for a risk assessment to be carried out prior to setting up the apiary so that any potential hazards are minimised. It is good to agree a code of conduct for those sharing the apiary so that standards of husbandry are maintained.

Swarming

All honey bees try to swarm although not every year. This is the only way they can reproduce and 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 to check for signs of swarming preparations during the 'swarming season' which is roughly April to July in the UK. There are a number of swam control techniques which a competent beekeeper will be aware of.

If and when swarming does occur, as it sometimes does despite the best efforts of the beekeepers, there is no need for other allotment holders to be concerned. Despite the 'busyness' of the bees, the swarm should settle down in a short time into the normal cluster and can be re-captured if it is safe to do so.

Bees are NOT normally 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 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.



Vandalism

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

Unattended Hives

Beekeepers should not use allotments as storage space for equipment that does not contain bees. No wax comb should be left exposed in an apiary, it should be stored in a bee-proof way.

Beekeepers should not knowingly put aggressive colonies of bees onto allotments. If you suspect that this is occurring, then the beekeepers 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.

Stings & First Aid

In general, bees will normally only sting to defend their home if provoked. They will react to their hive being tampered with.

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 of stings inside the nose or mouth) call an ambulance. Stings near eyes should receive prompt medical examination. If possible remove finger rings quickly if stung on the hand. Children who are stung should be observed for an hour or two to make sure there are no adverse effects.

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 for the bees and that other allotment holders are also aware of the correct procedures. This should still be the case even if there are no bees on your allotments.