

# Guidelines for Safe Urban Beekeeping in Calgary

## Disclaimer

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

- 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](mailto:bee@gov.ab.ca) for information).

## Introduction

Keeping honey bees In an urban setting requires responsible management to avoid creating nuisance and/or safety problems for neighbours. It is in everyone's best interest to ensure that beekeepers are sensitive to public 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 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, Dr. Medhat Nasr ([bees@gov.ab.ca](mailto:bees@gov.ab.ca)) for further information about registration. Unregistered owners are subject to fines (or even 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. Some ideas to help ensure an appropriate flight path include:

- Hives should be directed away from neighbouring properties.
- If your hives are within 20 feet of a property line, make sure there is a solid fence or vegetative obstruction at least 5 feet tall between the front of the hive and the property line

Be particularly mindful of children or 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 an defensive response from the hive.

Hives should only 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, don't keep more than two hives on a property that is less than 6,000 square feet, and no more than four on larger than 6,000 square feet.

## **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:

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

Keep the area around your hives clean of hive scrapings and other hive debris to minimizing 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).
- Brood chamber manipulation to make sure the queen has room to lay
- Ensuring adequate ventilation in the hive
- Replacement of old or failing queens

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.