

Stahlman Beekeeping

Notes for 2022

What advice would you give someone thinking about becoming a beekeeper?



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I recently had the opportunity to talk with some past students and ask the following question: "What advice would you give to someone wanting to become a beekeeper?"

I often feel as if I have to start over each fall thinking about what I am going to write about in these issues, and I often take so much for granted when I teach new beekeeping classes. It has been my experience that many individuals beginning beekeeping become discouraged. Many quit by the third year.

The over-all reaction to my question was this: Tell them it is not as easy as it sounds!

Most new beekeepers begin with high expectations. Taking a bee school gives the impression that one can do it. All it takes is a class, get bees, buy equipment and everything should work out fine. Some don't bother to take a class because everything to know is on the internet!

What follows comes from the mouth of beekeepers themselves about the first or second year of successfully keeping bees.

LeeAnn: Happy bees are so much more fun. Getting stung is no fun – especially on the nose. Make sure your veil is away from your face.

HalleAnn: If you do it right, it can be the most fun and rewarding life experience! Try to invest in the right tools. Use methods and equipment to keep your bees happy!

Lynn: Start learning before January by reading, Youtube, bee extension service. Join a local bee club and make contacts with other beekeepers. Get a mentor. Find a reliable local source for bees (queens, nucs, packages), Manage expectations for failure!

Keith: Find a mentor! A mentor and a new beekeeper should have a good working relationship and keep in touch for the entire first season!

Ray: If you can hold off your first year and work with a mentor and his/her hives; I think

you get a good understanding on what needs to be done to be a good beekeeper and not be a bee haver. Try to set goals on how many hives you can support. The more hives you want, the more equipment you need and unless you are rich, you will need to learn not only bees, but wood working. Keep it fun, not work. Go slow, not broke!

AnaRita: Take a class and or read books to learn about bees, their cycles, what they do, when and why before you get a hive/colony. When you start, get help from an experienced beekeeper to advise you. But in the end, you will learn by trial and error. There is normally more than one answer to what to do. So do what works for you and give yourself grace if it doesn't work out. Have fun and make it an enjoyable hobby.

Others:

- **Better to tell them that it is not cheap or easy!**
- **If you don't have the time to take care of a hive, don't get one! They are not like a cat or dog. Take neighbors into account – some don't want them in the neighborhood.**
- **You will not make money from a hive of bees if that is the reason you want to keep bees.**
- **Before you invest in hive equipment and bees, buy the best protective bee sting suit you can afford!**
- **Beekeepers lie! They tell you how easy it is! How much money you can make! How much fun it is. Check out local regulations on keeping bees. My HOA let me know that I could not keep bees in my backyard only after I bought hives and bees! It seems like bees are livestock like chickens and farm animals. No one told me this when I took a bee class.**

I have had the pleasure to work with a number of beekeepers in my lifetime. Kim Flottum is one of them. Kim has written a number of popular beekeeping books (all excellent for new beginning beekeepers). In the opening of his book, Better Bee Keeping, he cites another rather important individual who I admired but did not really know, Dr. Hachiro Shimanuki, who was the Research leader at the USDA Honey Bee Research Laboratory in Beltsville, Maryland. (Everything has changed from those days – reduced government funds have resulted in many changes – from being able to send samples of comb to be analyzed directly to see if a hive had AFB to the many bulletins published for farming and beekeeping).

However, Kim has this to say, “Shim’s observations were, profound, and any beekeeper who listened carefully to his challenge is probably doing quite well today.”

Kim adds: the complexity of achieving this goal of doing well is BASED ON SHIM'S RULE: "If you produce the right number of bees that are the right age and in the right condition, and are in the right place at the right time, you will be successful." THIS is the challenge called "THE RULE OF RIGHTS!"

So to the new beekeeper or any beekeeper -- Kim says, "To accomplish this requires:

- Make intelligent and correct decisions based on sound planning,
- Correct timing,
- Getting the balance of business and biology to work in an operation.

"It is a goal to strive for in many ways. It is, in the real world, not easy and it is not often that it is achieved. But when it is achieved, it is a thing of beauty." *Quote from Kim Flottum's book "Better Bee Keeping".*

The urgency to start beekeeping often leads to the failure to keep bees successfully. That is the message that every bee school should be teaching from the start!

The wisdom expressed by the beekeepers quoted in this article were learned by experience! It can only be gained by working and learning from the bees themselves.

I appreciate the feedback I get from beekeepers old and new. May the coming New Year be kinder to you and your bees than this fast moving past year! Beekeepers are optimists somewhat like baseball fans.

I love history – especially anything that involves beekeeping. At one time, I owned a number of major bee books going back to the 1600's. I still have a collection of Gleaning in Bee Culture going back to 1900. They take up a lot of room and every year adds the need for more space. Books have a tendency to collect dust. Fortunately many of the antique books are available as digital copies.

I did a quick search of ebay for cd's that contain digitized bee books. I would have suggested the Mann Library's, Phillips Bee Book Collection that at one time allowed one to download books free but I had trouble trying to access the material. Thus, I turned to ebay and I am sharing a couple of listings that one might be interested in buying. I don't like reading on my computer screen but this is an option for further reading some really old bee books. It saves shelf space and the cost is reasonable.



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Next week I will share the story of M. Quinby who wrote a book published in 1853. He started beekeeping 25 years before Langstroth wrote about his hive. If you want to read an interesting account of keeping bees by the man who is called "The father of commercial beekeeping or Practical beekeeping" I would highly recommend reading "Mysteries of Bee-Keeping Explained" this winter.

