

Choosing an Apiary site



Choosing a place to keep your beehives is comparable to finding a home for yourself. You need to sort out what you really want and then weigh this against what is possible. It will always be a compromise. This leaflet is to help you make a good choice and avoid some of the pitfalls. Good Luck!

Factors to be considered in selecting an Apiary site:

1. Will the site cause a nuisance to neighbours or the general **public** ? Is it safe from vandals?
2. Is there **forage** for the honey bees? Are there any apiaries nearby?
3. Is the **environment** of the site suitable for bees?
4. Is there convenient **access**, with minimal carrying for the beekeeper to bring in equipment and remove honey supers?
5. Is the **space** suitable for the number of hives envisaged?

1. Consideration for the public.

The general public are often ignorant and frightened of insects. If they become alarmed about the presence of bee hives, their complaints can result in your bees being considered a 'nuisance' with the consequent loss of apiary sites for yourself and other beekeepers.

Bees establish regular 'flight paths' en route to adjacent forage. Enclosing an apiary with hedges or a trellis to lift them above head height is good practice. This also reduces the visibility of beekeeper activity.

Avoid sites which border roads or public paths especially bridleways, where mounted riders may pass.

Keep only good tempered bees. Culling bad tempered stock and replacing with more docile strains is beneficial to both beekeeper and public.

Damage to hives from thieves and vandals can occur, so hives need to be well guarded or unobtrusive.

Out of sight out of mind is a good maxim.

Finding the site

Establishing good relations with neighbours, local farmers, land owners and the general public is a major factor in finding and maintaining a successful site for your bees.

Talk to them about the value of bees as pollinators; educate them about swarms, flight paths etc. Try to capture their interest and co-operation, gaining respect for the bees and the beekeeper.

Most beekeepers are tempted by the familiar and convenient location of their **own garden** where they can watch their bees at work and attend to them easily, but small gardens, particularly those surrounded by houses are not likely to be a successful solution. With careful management a small garden in open countryside or a garden at least the size of a tennis court could provide a suitable site for two or three hives.

Situations to avoid

- A small suburban garden, adjacent to areas where children play may cause instant complaints, when a beekeeper clad head to toe in protective gear ventures forth to inspect a newly sited colony.
- A cloud of roaring bees swarming into a neighbour's garden.
- Bees drinking at neighbours bird baths or garden ponds.
- Bees soiling the neighbours washing as they make their cleansing flights in early spring.
- A hive on a flat and possibly slippery roof accessible either by ladder or through an upstairs window!

In the **country-side** local farmers and gamekeepers can be very helpful in finding a good site. You may have noticed an attractive situation; it is the farmer who will direct you to the owner whom you must approach for permission to use the site.

The traditional payment for use of an apiary site is a pot of honey per year per hive although other agreements may be reached.

If your selected site is not possible you will usually be offered a choice of other sites. It is then that you must be quite clear and single minded about the criteria for a satisfactory site. Visit the possible places with a beekeeping friend and discuss the points reviewed in this leaflet. It will be time well spent. Moving site is no joke.

This leaflet is provided for general interest and information only.

No liability is accepted for any injury or loss arising out of the contents of this leaflet.

2. Forage

Honeybees mostly forage for both nectar and pollen within a kilometre of their hive and up to about five kilometres for exceptionally rewarding sources. An apiary site may be permanent, where forage during all growing seasons is desirable, or temporary to exploit a crop or seasonal source such as oil-seed rape, lime, heather or Himalayan balsam. Arable farmland may provide an excellent source for a month but then nothing for the rest of the year. Gardens are usually planted with year-round flowering plants, shrubs and trees. An apiary within flying range of these but sited in an area of low population density can be ideal.

It is a good idea to find out the location and size of other apiaries that might provide competition for forage in the area. Talk to members of your local association who may be able to help. There are no problems with small numbers of hives and vast farm crops but field margins and gardens provide much smaller though continuous forage. It is sensible not to compete with large beekeepers.

3. Environment

- The hives should be sheltered from the prevailing wind, so that foragers can land easily at the hive entrance and roofs are not blown off in gales. Avoid sites open to cold northerly or easterly wind.
- A generally southerly aspect will provide warm and dry conditions, especially helpful in winter.
- Avoid sites in a frost pocket which will check spring development or on low or damp ground that could become flooded.
- Sites under trees are unsuitable because they are usually damp.
- The area should be fenced from livestock which may kick over hives.
- Bees need water to dilute honey stores for use in spring and to cool the hive in hot weather. If this is not naturally available then consideration should be given to providing a suitable source, away from the main flight paths to avoid fouling.
- You may find it helpful to discuss potential sites with your local bee inspector, who can advise if there are any disease problems in the area.

4. Access

Convenient access is essential. Easy movement of equipment in and out of the apiary ensures that your routine inspections will be productive. Adding and removing supers, controlling swarming, feeding and treating the colonies is a pleasure when it is not physically demanding or hazardous.

Do not consider a site which entails climbing fences or crossing ditches to enter. It is ideal to have vehicular access right up to the hives when necessary. Remember, dry grassland may become impassable mud in wet weather.

A level site is easier to manage

5. Space

It is sensible to increase the number of hives envisaged, by at least two to allow for contingencies. Then make measurements and a rough plan of the site to confirm that you will have sufficient space.

Guidelines when making the plan.

- It is vital to have access to manipulate the colonies within the apiary, without working in the flight paths.
- It is more ergonomic if the orientation of the frames in the hive are across your body from where you plan to stand.
- There should be space to stack the removed supers and roof without the beekeeper moving away from the hive.
- Placing the hives on stands about 35 cm above the grounds makes for a comfortable working height for the beekeeper.
- The hive entrances should face in different directions to avoid drifting of bees between hives.
- Allow a distance of at least two hive widths between each hive.