



Setting up a Top Bar Hive

Introduction

Early Spring is the best time of the year to start a hive. Order bees* from a beekeeper in December. Beekeepers tend to sell out by March. Request that your order arrive in the spring. It's always very exciting to pick up your package of bees at the post office – and the postmaster will be just as excited to see them leave!

Equipment & Supplies

Establishing a [hive](#) requires a few beekeeping tools and household items in addition to a hive.

- Top Bar Beehive* complete with wooden top bars and a solid divider bar
- Hive tool*



- Bee brush*
- Spray bottle
- Quart glass jar
- Feeder*
- Serving spoon
- Granulated sugar

Instruction

Choosing a Hive Location

Before your bees arrive, look at the layout of your land and select a location for your hive.

- One of the first things to consider in selecting a location will be your neighbors. You won't want to place your hives where your neighbors' activities will affect the coming and going of your bees in and out of the hive.
- Next, consider your own activities. Avoid placing your hives in areas where you will be mowing, rototilling or making a lot of noise. Noises of this type often upset bees.

- The next thing to consider is elevation. You don't want to place a hive on top of a hill where the wind will blow it over. Place it near some kind of wind break.
- Bees need shade, especially during the summer and in southern climates. It is good for the hive to have some sun in the mornings, but place the hive where it has shade the rest of the day. Honeybees keep their [hive temperature](#) at 93°F. If you locate the hive in full sunlight, it will get too warm inside and the combs can get soft and melt.

* See *Beekeeping Suppliers List Supplement*

- Conversely, avoid situating your hive at the bottom of a hollow where cold air often accumulates. Bees fly at 55° to 57°F. They often stay confined in a cool area until it starts to warm up and therefore won't leave the hive as early as they should in the mornings. In the wintertime when the frost comes through, a low area can freeze harder.

Preparing the Hive

As soon as you bring your bees home from the post office, you will need to give them [sugar water](#).

- Mix a 50/50 water and sugar solution using granulated sugar. (Don't use powdered sugar. It contains cornstarch which is bad for the bees). Stir the solution until the sugar dissolves. Then pour it into a spray mister.
- Mist the bees by spraying sugar water through the ventilated sides of their shipping case. They've gone a long ways through the mail and are a little worn out. The sugar water will calm them down as well as perk them up.
- Remove 10 top bars from the front of the hive. The bees will build their combs from the attached [wax starter strip](#).
- Insert a [divider board](#) in the space after the tenth bar. This will confine the hive space and the bees won't have to initially work hard to heat or cool the entire hive. If the bees have more than a 10-bar space, they tend to build their combs crooked and may try to build the combs from front to back instead of side to side.



Preparing the Bees

- Mist the bees again with sugar water.
- Using a [hive tool](#), pry out the [sugar water can](#) in the top of the case and remove it. Mist the bees again through the hole.

The Queen's Cage

The beekeeper collected a total of 3 1/2 pounds of bees from several different hives and put them together in the shipping case. But he selected the [queen bee](#) from a separate hive that raises only queens. The bees are therefore not familiar with the queen.

The strap attached to the top of the case contains the queen bee in a cage. The queen puts out a smell called [pheromones](#) which attracts the other bees to her cage.

- Remove the [queen's cage](#) from the shipping case. Shake the bees on the outside of her cage into the empty hive.
- Check to see that the queen is healthy.

Her 3-chambered cage has a cork on both ends. The beekeeper placed some soft, marshmallow-like candy in the chamber furthest from the queen. Once the cork is removed from the candy end of the cage, the bees will slowly eat through the candy and release the queen.

It takes about 24 hours for the bees to get used to the queen, which is about the same amount of time it will take them to eat through the



candy. During this time the bees will familiarize themselves with the queen's pheromones and accept her. If the queen is released too soon, the bees will kill her.

- Using the end of the hive tool, remove the cork from the candy end of the cage. *It is very important that you take the cork out of the right end of the cage.*

Note: One of the most common mistakes for a new beekeeper is to forget to remove the cork. If this happens, you can remove it up to a week later. The sooner the queen gets out, the better.

- Hang the queen's cage between the first 2 top bars using the attached strand.

Note: Do not place the queen on the bottom of the hive. The bees will cluster at night at the top of the hive to build comb. They could forget her, and she will never be released and could starve to death.

Placing the queen forward promotes the building of honeycomb at the front of the hive. When you check the hive in a week you can expect the bees to be clustered around the queen and building in that location.

Putting in the Bees

- Mist the bees in the case with the sugar water once again.
- Shake the bees from the case down into the hive. As you dump them, mist them again.



The case contains around 1000 bees per pound, for a total of about 3000 bees.

- Tap the edge of the case on top of the hive to shake loose the remaining bees. Work quickly. Bees don't like to be shaken and they will cling to the edges of the case. Keep shaking until most of the bees are out. Place the case on the ground in front of the hive. The few remaining bees will fly into the hive.
- Mist the bees in the hive with sugar water one more time. Brush any bees on the outside into the hive. Replace the top bars.

Watch for bees that show signs of being happy with their new location. Normally you will see bees on the front edge of the hive fanning their wings to spread their pheromones.

Setting up the Feeder

The bees in the new hive have nothing to eat. All they have will come from you, so you have to feed them sugar water regularly. You could lose your hive if you don't feed them enough.

- Mix the sugar water. Fill a jar halfway with water. Then fill it the rest of the way with granulated sugar. Stir the solution until the sugar totally dissolves in the water.

Note: Remember to use granulated sugar. Do not use honey. You could inadvertently spread diseases to your new hive.

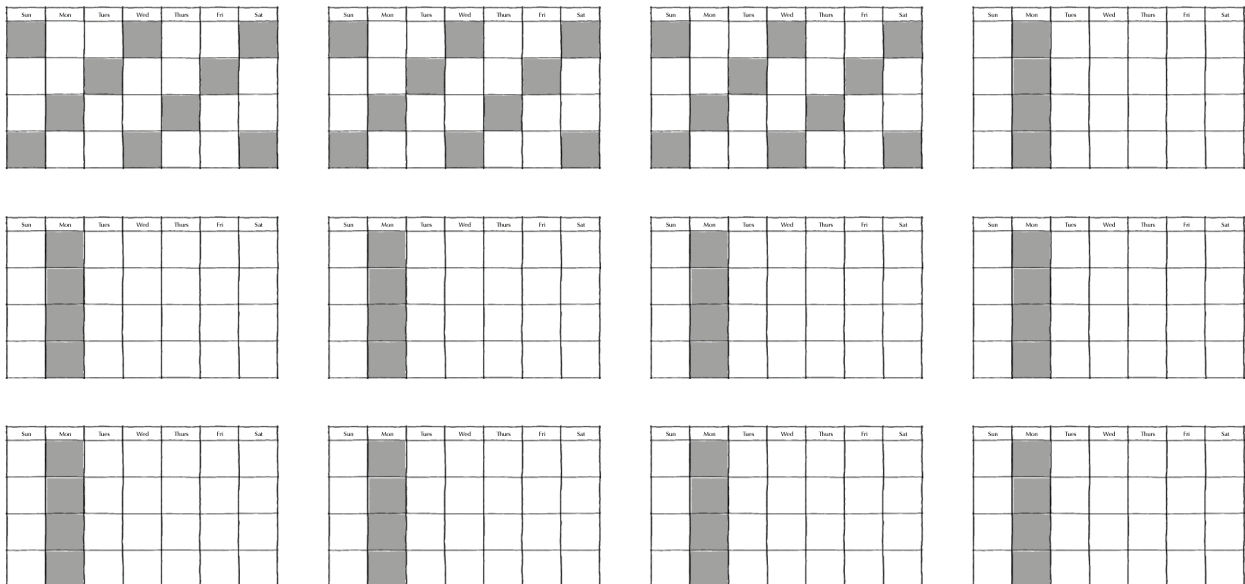




- Slide the feeder into the entrance of the hive and move it all the way to one side.
- Screw the perforated lid onto the jar. Invert the jar and place it into the feeder. The bees will remove the sugar water from the holes.
- Slide the cover onto the hive. Don't disturb the hive for a week while the queen is being released.
- At the end of the week check the hive and see how the bees are doing. Make sure the queen has gotten out, that the bees are healthy and that they are building new combs.

Feeding Pattern

- Its very important to feed your bees *at least* every 3 days for the first 3 weeks. Normally the bees will take in the first quart in about 3 days. After that as they begin to build up new comb, they will take in about a quart a day.
- Fed your bees 50/50 sugar water. The more you feed them, the healthier your hive will be.
- Continue to feed your bees once a week through the entire first year. After about 3 months they will empty the jar in about an hour's time.



For the first 3 weeks feed bees *at least* every 3 days • Continue feeding once each week for the first year

Questions about Beekeeping?

Submit any questions for Jacob in the Q&A section on the course homepage or post it to our blog at www.sustainlife.org/blog/category/beekeeping/

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- Introduction to Beekeeping
- Tools of the Trade
- The Bee Caste – Rank and Tasks
- The Hive - Langstroth vs Top Bar Hives

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Texas Hives

This company is owned and operated by Jacob and his family. You can buy his Top Bar Hive as well as other tools and supplies you'll need for beekeeping from Texas Hives.

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by Amos Ives Root

First Lessons in Beekeeping

by C.P. Dadant

Starting Right with Bees

by Henry G. Rowe

A.I. Root Co.

623 W. Liberty Street, Medina, OH 44256

The Bee Keeper's Handbook

by Diana Sammataro & Alphonse Avitabile

The Hive and the Honey Bee

by Joe M. Graham

American Bee Journal

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