

Preparing for and receiving your hive of native stingless bees

Position

You need to choose the best position for your hive before opening it. Give this careful consideration; you don't want to have to move them more often than necessary, so best to get the location right first time.

You can keep them anywhere in a sheltered position but choose a suitable micro-climate. Think about whether you would be comfortable sitting in that position 24/365 and, if yes, then the bees probably would be too. A covered outdoor area is usually good as they are protected and you can watch them more easily. Morning winter sun and afternoon summer shade is ideal. Often the place where you eat your breakfast in winter is a top spot, as morning sun warms the hive and stimulates the bees to get active. Afternoon sun can cook a hive especially in summer, so avoid exposed western positions. Hives should be completely shaded from at least 10am in summer, if not fully shaded.

Once released, you can move a hive up to 1m per day in any direction – this is a good strategy to adjust the position of your hive as the seasons change.

You can place them directly on the floor of a veranda or patio. But up on a stool, table, shelf, or other elevated position is useful to help them take flight. They do not need a source of water; they get all they need from nectar.

Temporary viewing panel

The bees breed in the bottom two boxes, which are separated from the top honey super by a brood excluder. This is a clear plate with a gap at the back that permanently stays in the hive. We have taped over the gap, confining the bees to the bottom two boxes. This allows you to loosen the luggage strap, lift up the top box and view your bees, providing a temporary observation window. You can inspect the bees whenever you wish as long as the honey super is replaced squarely to

exclude light. Leave the tape over the gap of the brood excluder in place until the bottom two boxes are looking quite full, or until you lose visibility, or are not interested in looking any more – up to you. Then remove the tape and quickly replace the honey super on so the bees can move into this space. If your super has clingwrap around it, remove this first. Tighten the strap and leave the honey super on permanently - you can tape around the outside of the box join at this time to keep it secure.



Mounting and protection

If you put the hive out in the open, you need to provide protection. Use the provided metal roof. Attach it by flexing it open and releasing it onto the top of the hive so that it clamps on. You will also need to protect the hive from threats from below, particularly termites and rot-inducing dampness. Raise the hive up a bit from the ground. This elevation will also help the bees to launch themselves into flight. The hive has short metal feet to hold it about 3 mm above the surface of the base you provide. If you fear problems with marauding or curious animals, you may wish to fasten the hive for extra protection. Below are a couple of options for a solid and permanent way to mount a hive. When

preparing a position for your hive, you may need to know the dimensions of the box. It has a footprint of 280 x 200 mm and a height of 250-315 mm.

1. **Mount a bracket on a wall** and place hive on the shelf. We provide the braced shelf illustrated below for \$50. You can use a small screw to secure the hive to the shelf, either from below or through the side brace.



2. **Build a concrete block stand**
Buy a concrete block and a 300 mm square paver. Ideally use a ¾ block, but single or double blocks also work. Place the paver on top as a base for the hive.



3. **If using a metal stand**, drive it into the ground with a mallet. Do not hit the metal directly or you will damage the galvanizing coat. Place the hive on top. Fasten the hive and roof to the base using the metal strap. We provide the galvanised metal stand illustrated for \$60 and the mini emlock metal strap and buckle for \$15.



4. **Mount the hive on a Y picket**
Drive the Y picket into the ground. Attach a suitable mounting bracket to the top of the picket by sliding the mount over the top of the picket. Place the hive on the mount – it should fit snugly in the metal frame of the mount, but secure if necessary. We sell mounts to fit an OATH hive, as well as a universal mount for boxes of other dimensions. These are \$60.



Use a metal cage in positions where security is a concern. The cage can be attached to a wall or sturdy post using screws at the back and/or side of the cage. The hive is then inserted into the cage to obscure the screws, limiting their removal and theft. The cage includes a door able to be padlocked (screws and padlocks not included). Attach your hive roof over the top for protection. Please note that hives can grow to weigh in excess of

12kg so ensure the surface the cage is attached to will withstand the weight.



Unpacking and releasing

Once you have a position for your hive, take your hive out of the cardboard box and remove the entire plug from the entrance (the entry hole should be flush with the outside hive surface). Also remove the plug from the smaller ventilation hole in the back. Please do this as soon as possible after receiving them. Bees should immediately emerge (if it is daylight and above 18°C). They will do an orientation flight to learn the new position. In this orientation flight they fly slowly backwards away from the hive, memorising the new position so they can get home after a flight. Within a day, you should see the first bees coming home with pollen on their hind legs, mission accomplished!

Do not open the wooden hive itself, only lift the top box off to view the bees while the tape is in place. Remember it may have been recently split and transported so it is still a little fragile.

Moving the hive

If you do need to move the hive, do so at night when the field bees are home. If you move it a short-intermediate distance, the bees may leave the hive the next day and some may forget the new location and return to the old location and never re-unite with their

hive. It's best to move it incrementally - no more than 1m in any direction per day. An alternative is to move the hive a distance of at least 1 km and leave it there for at least 3 weeks after which it can be moved again to the new permanent position. Remember that a healthy hive will produce about 300 new bees every day so don't worry if a few get lost.

Maintaining the wooden hive box

You can wipe down the hive with a wet cloth to keep it clean. You can re-paint the box either by touching up damaged areas or a complete re-paint. Avoid painting the area within 50 mm of the entrance and ventilation hole. Use an acrylic paint and apply at night or in winter when the bees are not active.

Propagating your hive

Keep an eye on the weight of your hive. It usually weighs around 6 kg when you first receive it. The box itself weighs 4.5 kg. So you will have at least 1.5 kg of contents which is mainly made up of stored honey and pollen, wax and resin building material and the immature and adult bees. You can propagate the hive by dividing it when it reaches 3 kg of contents, that is, a total weight of 7.5 kg. We recommend that you divide the hive before extracting honey. You should keep at least two hives. Most homes have space for at least two hives. Then if one hive dies, you can breed from the other. Once you have two hives, you can extract honey or keep dividing to provide hives for all your friends who will want one when they see yours. In SE Qld, the normal time between splitting is about one year. The further south you go, the longer this time will be. South or west of Sydney, you may never split your hive, nor be able to extract honey from it. Contact us to purchase an empty hive box for your split (\$175 +P&H).

Guarantee

We guarantee the survival of hives for one year as long as they are treated properly. If your hive dies, we will replace it, free of charge, upon return of the original box. We want your experience to be a positive one, so

please do not hesitate to contact us for a replacement or with any other issues. Note that we cannot guarantee a hive that experiences temperatures of greater than 42°C, receives direct sun after 10 am in summer, is kept outside their natural geographical range, is opened, is split, or has honey extracted.

Good forage for stingless bees

The bees will forage over a distance of several hundred metres so can access flowers over a large area. For ideas on plant species to grow, see the Valley Bees website page on planting and creating habitat to attract bees:

<https://tinyurl.com/y77kv8xk>

Fighting swarms

Often the bees swarm around the hive entrance and may engage in fighting in which bees lock themselves together and fight until death. We call them fighting swarms and they involve bees from the defending hive and another colony. The attacking colony is attempting to take over the defending one. Colonies rarely die out as a result of fighting and in fact may be strengthened by it. It is possible to manage fighting swarms by trapping them.

Cadaghi seeds

The red objects around the entrance of the hive are seeds of the eucalypt know as cadaghi or *Corymbia torelliana*. They are brought back to the hive in Dec / Jan when fruit (gumnuts) of this tree are mature. They bees collect the resin secreted in the gumnuts and disperse the seed in the process. You can remove it if you wish but it doesn't have to be removed, the bees will clear it away to their satisfaction. This is just another fascinating aspect of the biology of these bees. Although native to far north Qld, this tree has been planted as far south as Newcastle.

Insecticides

The bees are susceptible to insecticides. It should be safe to have the inside of your house sprayed for pests as it is unlikely any drift will enter the hive. However, if you are having treatment for termites that involves heavy applications of insecticides around the house, then move the hive away for a few weeks. Garden sprays may also be dangerous for the bees only if the spraying is done on a flowering plant that the bees are foraging on. If you suspect this is the case, move the hive away for a few days by closing it at night and keeping in a cool spot.

To learn more

If you want to learn more generally about stingless bees and beekeeping, come along to our workshops in Queensland and NSW. Check our website for when and where they are held: <https://www.sugarbag.net>. There's lots of other information here too. We recommend that you attend a workshop or get hold of written guides before you split or extract honey.

BUY: The Australian Native Bee Book by Tim Heard is a complete and richly illustrated guide to keeping stingless bee hives, buy online at <https://www.nativebeebook.com.au>.

See video of the hives, and how to manage them on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz3YsEQOM&list=PLYwzrfqWaOZsMgaUgPTqQf4YVfVWrHtxD>

Welcome to a lifetime of beekeeping pleasure!

Tim Heard and the team at
SUGARBAG BEES
Email: tim@sugarbag.net
Landline (preferred): 07 3844 4914
Mobile: 0434 416053