

Recommended Management Practices for Maintaining Honey Bee Colonies in Maryland

Maryland State Beekeepers Association

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The Maryland State Beekeepers Association (MSBA) provides the following recommended reasonable and responsible beekeeping practices and behavior in pursuing the keeping of honey bees, and in respecting the rights, safety, and well-being of neighbors and the local environment.

Managed honey bees provide pollination services to improve commercial agricultural production and the health of our ecosystems, honey, and other significant economic benefits to the citizens of Maryland. Honey bees are valuable in education, sustainable private and community agriculture, research, and for family enjoyment. Well-managed colonies may be kept safely in virtually all locations of Maryland regardless of housing density. Maintaining a vigorous and responsible body of skilled beekeepers and their population of European honey bees throughout Maryland is the best possible deterrent to colonization by the Africanized Honey Bee (AHB), and in dealing with any inadvertent incursions of AHB's.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) has regulatory authority over beekeeping and maintains a Best Management Practices that must be followed by beekeepers moving colonies into and out of Maryland for commercial purposes, in order to maintain healthy and safe pollination services for Maryland agriculture. The MDA BMP does not apply to beekeepers who maintain their colonies only within the state. MSBA has no regulatory authority, and adherence to these MSBA recommendations is voluntary. MSBA will support the rights of beekeepers who follow these recommendations.

I. General beekeeping practices

The responsible beekeeper:

1. will abide by and remain in compliance with Maryland laws and local ordinances as they pertain to honey bees.
2. will have sound knowledge of honey bee behavior and beekeeping and are encouraged to complete an Introductory Beekeeping course at a college or university, or offered by a beekeeping association or Master Beekeeper (often called a Short Course), and stay current on issues of colony health and management.
3. when maintaining colonies within 200 feet of the property line, will provide and maintain a water source close to the hives (less than 200 feet),
4. will maintain a distance of at least 50 feet between the apiary and any tethered or kenneled animal,
5. will practice swarm prevention, retrieve swarms as promptly as possible, and be responsive to calls regarding honey bee activity in the neighborhood.

II. Special considerations in residential areas

1. Beekeepers will be considerate of neighbors and discuss their intentions with adjacent neighbors before establishing an apiary.
2. Beekeepers shall limit ready access to the apiary to minimize disturbance of hives by people.
3. The location and flight paths of the colony should be arranged carefully, and colonies (and buffers and barriers if needed) should be located and oriented so that flyways are above head level when the honey bees cross adjacent property lines,
4. Make allowance for nearby activities in deciding when to open colonies, if neighbors or the general public are participating in outside activities or using heavy machinery within 75 feet of the apiary.

III. To help prevent the spread of Africanized Honey Bees

The responsible beekeeper will:

1. maintain colonies only of the European Honey Bee (EHB).
2. promptly report all highly defensive colonies, and/or colonies suspected of being non-EHB, to the State Apiary Inspector, and collect and submit samples of these to the Inspector at his request.
3. dequeen all colonies which are highly defensive as soon as possible but no later than 7 days.
4. requeen and destroy all reproductive brood (queen and drone cells) in colonies found to be "not EHB" as determined by the MDA, as soon as possible but no later than 7 days of notification.
5. kill all colonies determined to be a pure or a hybrid race other than EHB (with 95% certainty) as determined by the MDA, within 7 days of notification.

6. ensure that all queens purchased from “AHB suspect or detected areas” are produced in compliance with Queen Producer Best Management Practices. The MDA maintains a list of queen breeders who are in compliance.(1)

7. maintain a healthy population of EHB drones by keeping an equivalent of a full deep frame of drone comb for drone production, not Varroa trapping, in at least one colony, or in 10% of all colonies for apiaries with 10 or more colonies .

IV. Africanized Honey Bee Areas

In the event that any county is declared an Africanized Honey Bee (AHB) suspect or detected area by the MDA, the responsible beekeeper shall:

1. Annually requeen and maintain all colonies with marked queens produced in compliance with Queen Producer Best Management Practices (1);
2. Inspect hives for the presence of a laying marked queen every two months between March 1st and October 31st and maintain written records of inspections;
3. Provide the name and contact information of all suppliers from which queens have been purchased to the State Apiary Inspector and keep receipts of purchase and any certificates of origin for those queens for two years;
4. Maintain only marked queens, and promptly replace any unmarked queens with marked queens produced in compliance with the Queen Producer Best Management Practices (1);
5. Kill all swarms caught or trapped, or replace within 7 days the queens of swarms caught or trapped with marked queens produced in compliance with the Queen Producer Best Management Practices (1);
6. Maintain at least one bait trap/hive in each apiary.

(1) All queens produced outside of AHB suspect or declared areas are considered in compliance with the Queen Producer Best Management Practices. A listing of queen producers inside AHB suspect or declared areas who are in compliance with the recognized Queen Producer Best Management Practices, and a listing of counties inside suspect or declared areas are both available from MDA.