

Guidelines for Safe Urban Beekeeping in Chestermere

Fall 2015

Disclaimer

This document offers guidelines for responsible hobby beekeeping in Chestermere, Alberta. This document, slightly modified for Chestermere, is based off of 2013 guidelines created by the Calgary and District Beekeepers Association that were originally endorsed by Apiaries and Bees for Communities.¹ This is not an instructional text, and anyone interested in urban beekeeping is strongly urged to get involved with local beekeepers groups to take advantage of courses offered through them and to stay up-to-date on the ever-evolving techniques for hive management. See the references section at the end of the document for a list of local groups.

Introduction

Beekeeping has been a rural and urban activity for thousands of years. Today beekeepers are active across Alberta, in Rocky View County, and throughout Calgary. Many major cities across North America embrace urban beekeeping, recognizing the value they bring to the urban environment. Keeping honey bees in an urban setting requires responsible management to ensure safety and promote goodwill with neighbours. If managed well, urban beekeeping can be an enjoyable and beneficial activity for the whole community. It is in everyone's best interest if beekeepers are sensitive to the public's safety and concerns. This document is intended to be a guideline for responsible honey bee management in the city of Chestermere. It serves as:

- a resource for information to reinforce community confidence in the safety of beekeeping activities,
- a resource for the beekeeping community to avoid and address complaints or conflicts about beekeeping activities in Chestermere,
- and a list of best management practices for anyone keeping bees within the city of Chestermere.

Responsibility

Any person who keeps honey bees has the duty to ensure the maintenance of the bees. Best practices will help foster healthy bees, significantly reduce concerns from neighbours, and create a culture that appreciates all that honeybees bring to the community.

Hive Registration

Beekeeping in Alberta is regulated by Alberta Agriculture. Anyone who keeps bees or owns beekeeping equipment anywhere in Alberta must, by law, register with Alberta Agriculture every year by June 30 (in Alberta, the Bee Year is July 1 to June 30). Registration is free. Contact the Provincial Apiculturist for Alberta (bee@gov.ab.ca) for further information about registration. Unregistered owners are subject to fines or imprisonment under the Alberta Bee Act (<http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/B02.pdf>).

Education

In an effort to help dispel myths about honeybees, beekeepers are encouraged to educate the public about the behaviours of honeybees. Education is a key resource in helping neighbours

¹Calgary and District Beekeeper's Association set of guidelines, used as a template for this document, may be found here: <http://www.delta-business.com/CalgaryBeekeepers/UrbanBeekeepingGuidelines/BeeGuidelinesCalgaryJan2013.pdf>

understand and appreciate modern urban beekeeping. By speaking openly and honestly about beekeeping and offering opportunities for others to experience beekeeping in a hands-on way, you create a culture of understanding and appreciation for apiculture and our natural environment.

Location of Hives

An appropriate honeybee flight path is one of the most important considerations for urban beekeepers. Some ideas to help ensure an appropriate flight path include:

- Hives should be directed away from neighbouring properties.
- If your hives are within 20 feet of a property line, make sure there is a solid fence or

vegetative obstruction at least 5 feet tall between the front of the hive and the property line. Be particularly mindful of children or children's play areas when placing your hive. Consider keeping the hive inconspicuous so as to minimize the hive's visibility to curious visitors and vandals.

Number of hives

As a general guideline, urban, non-commercial backyard beekeepers should restrict themselves to two hives on a standard residential property in Chestermere.

Water

A constant source of water should be provided at all times for your hives starting before the snow melts in the spring, and continuing late into fall.

Queens

A young queen of a gentle stock is preferred, and should be obtained from reliable sources. Check with local beekeeping groups for reliable sources of queens.

Considerate hive management

Hive inspections and manipulations disturb the bees, so do what you can to minimize the disturbance. The judicious use of smoke can help calm the bees, as does timing your hive inspections for when:

- Field bees are out foraging
- The hive is not under stress
- The hive is in direct sunlight
- Temperatures are moderate
- Your neighbours are not out in the yard

Keep the area around your hives clean of hive scrapings and other hive debris to minimize the likelihood of attracting other bees, wasps or other unwanted visitors. If you are going to be away for an extended period of time, arrange for someone to inspect your hives.

Swarming

Swarming is natural honey bee behaviour, but can be avoided. Swarming is not: bees chasing people. Swarming is: honeybees moving to a new location. Simple steps can and should be taken to discourage swarming in urban settings. Effective swarm prevention practices include:

- Regular inspections for indication of swarming
- Properly timed increases in the space available to the hive
- Splitting the hive (and keeping spare equipment on hand in case you need to split).
- Avoid using swarm cells as a source of queens when splitting
- Brood chamber manipulation to make sure the queen has room to lay
- Ensuring adequate ventilation in the hive

If a swarm is seen, immediate efforts should be made to collect the swarm. Contact one of the local beekeeping groups if you need assistance.

Disease Control

A primary responsibility for beekeepers is to properly manage disease and pests to ensure hive health. All beekeepers must be able to recognize and deal with several honey bee diseases and pests, be sure to read and follow the annual guidelines published by the Provincial Apiculturist. There are many approaches to disease and pest management, and techniques are evolving quickly. Getting involved with the beekeepers groups in Calgary is one of the best ways to stay on top of the latest disease and pest management techniques.

Liability

For peace of mind, as in anything, you are encouraged to carry liability insurance to cover accidents related to your beekeeping activities. Insurance is available to members of the Alberta Beekeeper's Commission. See the Resources section below for more information.

Resources

Having a beekeeping mentor is strongly suggested for new beekeepers. Even experienced beekeepers benefit from having healthy relationships with other local beekeepers. A few helpful resources in Calgary include:

Calgary Beekeeping Groups:

- Calgary & District Beekeepers Association: <http://www.calgarybeekeepers.com>
- Apiaries and Bees for Communities (ABC): <http://www.backyardbees.ca/>

In addition to the local beekeepers groups, courses are also offered through Alberta Agriculture (email bee@gov.ab.ca for information)

Alberta Provincial Apiculturist:

- The Provincial Apiculturist for Alberta is Dr. Medhat Nasr (bee@gov.ab.ca).

Alberta Beekeepers Commission:

This organization offers many resources, including the option for members to purchase liability insurance.

- <http://www.albertabeekeepers.org/>

Chestermere Beekeepers:

Dr. Preston Pouteaux is a local beekeeper who has modified this document as a guideline for use in Chestermere. He is an advocate for responsible beekeeping in Chestermere. He may be contacted at prestonpouteaux@gmail.com. Those interested in starting a local beekeepers club are welcome to connect with him.