

Beginner Beekeeping Course

CCG - Leongatha

24 & 31 August 2016

with David & Bronwyn Barton

General Cautions: Guidelines & Recommendations for Beginner Beekeepers

Be Protected:

A Face Veil is absolutely essential to protect the face and no one should ever inspect a honeybee colony without one. They come in various designs but the main design essentials are that, when worn correctly there are no gaps to allow entry by a bee, that you can see well through the mesh and feel adequately protected.

1/2 and full suits are good as they enclose the body and face with cloth and mesh and incorporate elastic cuffs as well as being easy to get on and off.

It can be helpful to wear a brimmed hat or peaked cap under the suit to hold the mesh away from your face. Suits will wash in the washing machine on a gentle cycle and this should be done at least once each beekeeping season e.g September - April

Gloves & Boots will need to be worn when you are just starting. You may be confident enough later to ditch gloves if you find they are cumbersome and impeding your ability to manoeuvre frames and your hive tool etc. Bear in mind that one of the first places bees are going to try to sting you is your hands.

Rubber washing-up gloves work well. They are easy to wash (or replace) and keep clean and disease-free. Wear these with elasticated cuffs to cover any gaps between the sleeves of your bee suit and the gloves.

Leather gloves with long calico gauntlets are often used but these can be hard to keep clean and the bees can sting through them anyway if they really want to.

Gum-Boots are often worn by beekeepers with their suit or pant legs tucked in. Gaiters can also be worn over the top. Remember bees can drop into the top of your boots but they do tend to walk up-hill!

Irrespective of how quiet your bees are there is always one out to sting you!

Allergies:

Are you or members of your household allergic to bee sting?

Reactions to bee stings range from a swollen sore, bruised or itchy area around the site of the sting to severe life-threatening events. If you don't know or unsure of your allergy status, contact your local GP to arrange an allergy test. Your allergy status is important especially if you will be working alone with your bees.

Bee stings are usually very painful at first and it is important to get the stinger out of the skin asap. **Flicking** it off with your fingernail is the best option. Squeezing the stinger will cause more venom to pump into you. If done quickly and properly the pain should subside quite fast.

The main reaction occurs afterwards when the body reacts to the foreign protein that has been injected. Most reactions to stinging insects are mild and amount to no more than pain, redness and swelling at the sting site. In some individuals, the swelling affects a larger area, such as a sting on the hand causing the lower arm to swell. Those larger, local reactions are also only uncomfortable and rarely dangerous.

In approximately 3 percent of adults, though, insect stings result in the much more serious reaction of anaphylaxis. The onset of anaphylactic shock might begin as much as an hour or more after a sting, but most severe allergies are evident within minutes. A hive-like rash is noticeable beyond the sting site, and swelling affects the face and throat. Wheezing, dizziness, rapid pulse and shortness of breath follow, and shock, unconsciousness and cardiac arrest may occur within minutes.

Prompt first aid and emergency treatment is essential. If possible, scrape away the stinger to prevent further exposure to the venom. Many individuals aware of a severe sting allergy carry an Epi-Pen and might be able to help a responder administer the medication. A call to emergency services is necessary prior to any lay responder treatment.

Most commonly the sting area will swell up and be uncomformable and itchy (or very very itchy) for a while, maybe even a couple of days, before disappearing.

Proprietary antihistamine medications for hay-fever or antihistamine creams for insect bites can be helpful, especially if they contain a local anaesthetic and cooling agent. Most people don't need anything.

Immunity: Most beekeepers gradually gain an immunity to the swelling after keeping bees for a few season. In about 10% of cases, people have a stronger reaction and swell up, sometimes alarmingly. The speed of such systemic reactions gives a rough indication of their seriousness.

In very rare cases, a hypersensitive person can be allergic to even single bee's sting. This can cause a rash, palpitations, breathing difficulties and unconsciousness, and requires urgent medical intervention. However, the normal outcome is a quick recover after treatment. The skill, of course is to avoid getting stung in the first place.

Smoker Safety:

The smoker is used to control the bees in a beehive. No one really knows why smoke controls bees, but it does. Some say it simulates a forest fire and triggers an instinctive reaction to gorge on honey - necessary before fleeing from the nest to find another home elsewhere - and when the bees are full of honey they are less likely to sting. The smoker is a simple but effective design. A nozzle at the top of the cylindrical fire box directs the smoke and a grid at the bottom keeps the air intake clear. This, plus a set of spring-loaded bellows, allow a draught to be forced up through at the fuel.

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