

BEEKEEPING IN SOUTHEASTERN TENNESSEE

By: Ann M Dale

Backyard beekeeping is not only a great hobby that rewards you with delicious, natural honey, but also is a great way to help save the honeybees. Not a lot of space is needed, nor a garden because honeybees can fly up to 5 miles to get to pollen and nectar. However, if you have a garden in your yard or farm you certainly would have great pollination. There is no reason to be scared of having bees in your yard and/or farm. They normally are calm, pleasant creatures and only interested in getting their nectar, raising their brood, bringing back pollen and that's it.

A beekeeper keeps bees for the purpose of securing honey, beeswax, pollinate crops, and to produce bees for sale to other beekeepers. The bees are free to forage as they desire for pollen and nectar and then they return to their hive. According to a recent Associated Press article, scientists are concerned because of the vital role bees play in our food supply. About one third of the human diet is from plants that require pollination from honeybees, which means everything from apples to zucchini.

Honey is man's oldest sweetener. Honey contains vitamins, minerals and amino acids. Honey also acts as an antibacterial and antifungal agent and helps disinfect and speed healing in wounds and burns. Besides honey, a bee hive produces an abundance of other products and benefits. Beeswax is used in making candle wax, balms, and soaps. Bee-collected pollen is in demand at health food stores as a human food supplement. Interestingly, you could cut a piece of honeycomb and put on a dessert plate, as it is totally edible and will delight your guests.

The Tennessee Valley Beekeepers Association <http://tennvalleybeekeepers.org> offers a Beekeeper Mentoring Course and is currently taking applications for the next course. In February 2010 the TVBA offered a free Introduction to Beekeeping class for anyone interested. It was a very informative class with many attendees. After that introduction class anyone that wanted to further their education signed up for the mentoring course starting in March. This eight month course included classroom and field instructions. Experienced beekeepers from TVBA, serve as the mentors and instructors. The cost of the mentoring course included a garden hive, basic beekeeping equipment and the bees. The bees came from Wolf Creek Organic Apiaries in Centerville, Tennessee. Wolf Creek is dedicated to organic management of bees and produce a gentle bee that is a good honey producer.

This first mentoring course had over 30 participants from all backgrounds and ages. One participant stated he was interested because as a child he would go into the woods with his father and pull honey from a hive in a tree. Hands on instruction in the bee yard has made this mentoring course much better for the "New-Bee" Beekeeper than when someone would order from a supply dealer with a 10-minute demo and then is left on his own. This is pretty much a formula for failure. By being in a mentoring course where all the hives are in one location you get to compare the different hives and see the progress or problems that each are having and how to correct them.

The Tennessee Valley Beekeepers Association members are very willing to share their knowledge. They have a monthly meeting at 6183 Adamson Cr., Chattanooga on the fourth Monday of each month at 7 PM. Their mission statement is: ***To promote the study, science and craft of beekeeping and to provide education and encouragement to all Tennessee Valley beekeepers.***

In the book, "Natural Beekeeping" by Ross Conrad, there is a passage that states: "Since the honeybee exerts such a powerful beneficial influence on the natural world around us, it seems logical to assume that our own efforts to help the honeybee thrive can indirectly benefit all of nature."