



How to Start a Beehive

By Danielle Baker

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For the last five springs, I have worked on a bee farm as a grafter. I use special bee frames to remove the very small larvae with a tool. When the larvae are put into single cells, worker bees put beeswax around each queen. After they grow, the valuable queens are sucked out of their cells with a vacuum, put into small wooden boxes with mesh wire on one side (allowing air to flow in the shipping process). They are sold to beekeepers around the world.

After picking up some necessary tools such as a veil, hive tool, bee brush, bee smoker, syrup (bee food) and hive at a local bee supply store, I was ready to pick up my 1st colony of bees. Last May, I brought a hive (approximately 10,000 bees) that included a queen home to my dad's ranch. Our goal is to have many bee hives again, like my great grandfather did when he farmed the land. Some of the bees got smashed on the 150 mile drive. I was told to keep them in a quiet and cool location until we were able to set them up, so we put them in the cellar.

The first night we were going to try to install the hive, we started in the early evening because I had a birthday party to get to. The bees were so active that after they were carried to the desired location around 5 p.m., we decided to bring them back to the cellar and try the next night right before dusk. This was a good decision because at this time of day the bees were calm. What was not a good decision was not taping my pants around my ankles to prevent bees from climbing up my legs during set-up.

At dusk, we carried the bees over to the new hive. I was told to spray the hive down with water which will keep them from flying off. Another technique that helps is to put syrup on a bee brush and gently brush the outside of the box. At this point you can open the top of your bee package; remove the syrup and queen cage. Keep the hole covered while you place the queen cage

between the top bars of the frames. Now you are ready to pour the bees out, allowing them to enter through the front hive entrance.

There are different ways to place feed into your hive. In our case, my dad cut a circular hole in the top of the hive that allowed for a quart canning jar lid to fit tightly. After placing a very small hole in the lid, he placed the syrup jar upside down, fitting onto the top of the hive. After four to five days, check the queen cage and refill feeder. The queen should have been able to eat candy to get out of her cage. If you have activity, it means she took to your new hive... and you're on the way to becoming a backyard beekeeper!

Interested in starting a hive? A good reference is online at the Harry H. Laidlaw Jr. Honey Bee Research Facility at <http://beebiology.ucdavis.edu>. The El Dorado Backyard Beekeepers are a great local resource at <http://eldoradobeekeepers.com/>.

Join Master Gardener Sharlet Elms this Saturday for “Beekeeping for the Backyard” class. The free, three hour class will start at 9 a.m., February 8, at the Veteran’s Memorial Hall, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville. Improve your garden and help the world at the same time – consider keeping bees. Topics to be discussed include the basics of backyard beekeeping and maintaining a hive or two, the current state of bees and how they affect our everyday lives. Resources to get started will also be offered.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at [http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC Master Gardeners/](http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/). Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.