Backyard Honeybees

Jefferson County allows the keeping of bees in most single family detached and duplex zone districts under certain conditions. A miscellaneous permit needs to be obtained from the County's Planning and Zoning division prior to keeping any bees on the property. This guide discusses additional items that a person should consider when deciding whether or not to keep bees.

Benefits

There are many benefits to having backyard honeybees. Not only will they provide fresh, organic honey, but they also pollinate flowers and vegetable gardens.

Considerations

Neighbors may be allergic to or uneasy about honeybees. Consider talking with neighbors about the desire to have honeybees before buying materials. It may also be considerate to let any neighbors know when the bee hive will be disturbed.

Predator Resistant

Mice can be a huge nuisance to a beekeeper. They can easily wipe out an entire colony. Placing hardwire mesh, no greater than ½ inch in size, around the entrance of the hive will prevent the rodents from getting into the hive. If larger predators are anticipated, such as bears, additional hive security may be necessary. Many predators will continue to revisit the area once they have had a taste of the honey; prevention is vital to the survival of the hive.

Swarming

Swarming season in Colorado is typically the first part of spring. Bees are most docile when swarming so do not panic. Contact a professional right away to remove the bees and find them a new home. Swarm hotlines and pick up information is on the Colorado Beekeepers Association's and the Denver Beekeepers Association's websites.

Definitions

Bee: any stage of the common domestic honeybee, Apis Mellifera species. Bees do not include any type of non-domestic bee.

Bottom board: long flat panel, typically made of wood or plastic, which is placed beneath a hive box but atop a hive box stand or other foundation structure that together, serve to elevate and protect the colony.

Brood: eggs, larvae, and pupae that will become bees.

Colony: a hive box stand or foundation structure, a bottom board, a hive box or boxes, a queen excluder, a super or supers, an inner cover, and a top or outer cover all stacked atop each other, and appurtenances attached thereto, including bees, comb, honey, pollen, and brood. It also means any group of bees residing within, or outside of, a hive box.

Frame: a structural element fitting into a hive box that is typically made of wood or plastic, and that holds or provides support for a honeycomb or brood comb.

Hive box: a box-like structure, typically made of wood or plastic, intended for the housing of a bee colony. A hive box is sometimes known as a hive body or brood chamber.

Super: box-like structure, typically placed atop a hive box or queen excluder but beneath a top cover, that is used to store honey, and that allows beekeeper to extract surplus honey without harm to the colony.

Swarming: a body of honeybees in migration from a hive that fly off together, accompanied by a queen, to start a new colony.

Top cover: lid that is typically made of wood or plastic, and that is placed on top of a hive box or super to protect the colony.

Bees as a neighbor

When hearing a neighbor is going to keep bees, there may be some anxiousness felt about whether there will be an increased risk of stings or concerns about swarming. 90% of all stings come from yellowjackets, not honey bees. Honey bees away from their hive are docile unless they are stepped on or unnecessarily aggravated. Honey bees will sting for defense if their hive is threatened. When living near a hive, it is recommended to be are observant when using loud equipment near a hive, especially a lawnmower, don't use flowery perfumes, soaps or lotions, don't swat at the bees near or on the hive and wear light-colored clothing.

Swarms may occur in a thriving colony where more space is needed to accommodate the growing number of bees. A beekeeper can prevent or reduce swarming. While a swarm may appear alarming, bees in a swarm are usually not aggressive because they are without a nest to defend. Additionally, before leaving their old hive bees gorge themselves on honey to provide for the new nest; while gorged on honey, they have difficulty bending their abdomen to sting. If a swarm is spotted, contact the nearby hive owner to see if it is from their hive and ask them to relocate the swarm. There is also swarm information, including swarm hotlines and pick up listed on the Colorado Beekeepers Association's and the Denver Beekeepers Association's websites.

Resources

Denver Urban Homesteading Class
www.denverurbanhomesteading.com

Colorado Beekeepers Association
www.coloradobeekeepers.org