

Apiary and Hive Hygiene

Background

Whilst many diseases can be introduced to your hives by bees themselves, good apiary and hive hygiene can reduce the impact of disease and will help to minimise the risk of disease transmission between colonies and apiaries.

Hygienic practices should extend to cover hives and frames, equipment and clothing as well as the apiary itself.

Equipment

- Equipment such as hive tools, uncapping forks, forceps, etc. can be very effectively cleaned in a solution of washing soda dissolved at the ratio of 1kg of washing soda to 5 litres of water. Avoid splashing this solution on hands or into eyes as it is an irritant.
- Hive tools can either be soaked in the washing soda solution or can be cleaned using a scouring pad or stainless steel scourer.
- Smokers should be regularly cleaned paying particular attention to the bellows. Any accumulation of wax or propolis should be scrapped off and then the residue cleaned using the washing soda solution and a scourer.
- Brood boxes can be cleaned by scrapping away any accumulations of wax and propolis and then "flaming" them with a gas torch to minimise the risk of bacteria persisting. This is particularly necessary after a diagnosis of foul brood disease. Other measures will be necessary where brood boxes are not wooden.

Clothing

- Try to ensure that all clothing and equipment is clean and free from accumulations of wax, propolis etc. before commencing any inspection of a colony.
- Bee suits should be regularly washed in accordance with the manufacturers recommendations; a half cup of washing soda added at the start of the wash will help to remove propolis, wax and honey staining – it may be advisable to reduce the amount of washing additive when adding washing soda.
- Gloves should always be clean at the start of an inspection as any odours from previous stings etc can cause further stinging actions. Disposable gloves are very useful – if you feel that you need the security of traditional thick leather gloves, wear disposables over the thick gloves.
- Always dispose of disposable gloves in a secure receptacle where bees cannot get at them.
- Boots can often become covered in honey and should be regularly cleaned – again washing soda solution will be an effective cleansing agent.

In the Apiary

- It is useful to have a small sealable container into which brace, burr and other scrap wax can be placed and taken away from site. Old comb discarded in the apiary can set up robbing and can be a vector for disease transmission.
- Avoid leaving old combs and other equipment lying about in the apiary.

In the Hive

- Regular comb changing can lead to improvement in the health of your bees. Brood combs should be replaced with new foundation at least every three years.
- When inspecting colonies, avoid crushing or squashing bees – use of dummy boards can assist in this respect.
- Avoid using "inspection or cover cloths" as these can harbour disease which could be spread from one colony to another.
- Try not to swap frames around in the hive (or between hives) - replace them in their original sequence and orientation.



This leaflet was produced as part of the Healthy Bees Plan. The Healthy Bees Plan aims to address the challenges facing beekeepers in sustaining the health of honey bees and beekeeping in England and Wales. It has been jointly developed by Governments, beekeepers, their associations and other stakeholders.

For more information on the Healthy Bees Plan visit:

<http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk//healthybeesplan>