

Urban Beekeeping in DC

Or, How Viable Pollination
Partnerships Can Change Your Life



The fundamentals

Everywhere that creatures live is a habitat

- Yes, cities are habitats, human-centered ones

All sustainable habitats consist of myriad interconnected creatures and relationships

- No two are the same, and all beekeeping is local
- Your local can be as small as your back yard

Every door opens another

Overview

- An apology: this is not a beekeeping course
- Our beekeeping community
- Why bees are important, and why beekeeping matters
- Why bees and cities work well together
- The role of the beekeeper
- A little about gear and practicalities
- How to get started
- Web Handouts
- Questions (at the very end)

Hives Around Town



Fairmont Hotel



USDA People's Garden



White House



DC Parks & Community
Gardens



Smithsonian Natural
History Observation
Hive



Family Backyards

Why Bees Are Important Everywhere

- One third of the human diet requires insect pollination, 80-90% of that is done by bees
- This pollination is responsible for approximately \$2 billion in crops in the US yearly
- As we have seen with ethanol, even small percentage changes in food availability mean famine for many
- Honeybee products are constantly finding new medical applications
- Traditional hive products have been staples for millennia
- Bees are the pollinators with whom humans have been best able to partner in the largest number of environments and applications



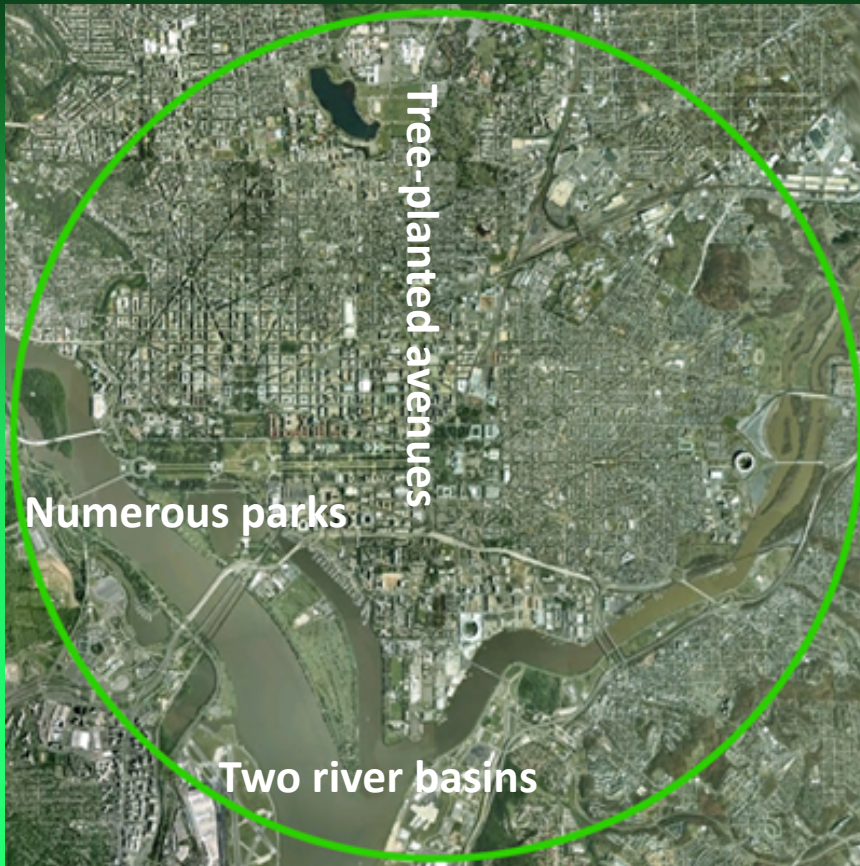
Why Bees Are Our Ultimate Pollinator Partner

Please let me repeat myself:

- We share mutually supportive lifestyles, including year-round family lives and complex social organizations
- Miraculously, this has made us partners in agriculture, in medicine, and in studies as diverse as internet server provisioning and democratic decision making
- This relationship with such different-yet-similar species will enhance your experience of being human



Our City is a Great Honeybee Habitat



(3-mile radius centered on US Capitol)

What doesn't show?

- Community gardens
- Home gardens
- Window boxes
- Green roofs

What isn't here (much)

- LAWNS



Why DC Works for Bees (as well as people)

- Physical placement: two river basins, numerous creeks
- Parks with trees
- Less agro chemical use
- Small gardens are better than big lawns
- Investments in tree scape, green roofs
- Flat roofs are excellent and protected

Why Bees Are Important in DC

- While we associate bees with crops for people, everything that sets a seed needs pollination
- Our companion critters need plants, too
- Plants with viable reproduction flower and leaf out longer, clean more air and water, create more habitat
- May be most important single thing an individual can do for the environment
- It changes your relationship with this beautiful place
- Local hive products rock



DC Law

District of Columbia Municipal Regulations

Title 24 - Public Space and Safety (December 1996)

904 BEES

904.1 No bees or hives of bees shall be permitted to be kept when there are human habitations within a radius of five hundred feet (500ft.).

904.2 The provisions of this section shall not apply to bees confined in hives, or to bees kept on property that is enclosed so that the bees cannot stray from the property.

SOURCE: Article 16, §14 of the Police Regulations (May 1981)

District of Columbia Official Code Division I. Title 8. Subtitle E. § 8-1808.

(h)(1) Except as provided in this subsection, no person shall import into the District, possess, display, offer for sale, trade, barter, exchange, or adoption, or give as a household pet any living member of the animal kingdom including those born or raised in captivity, except the following: domestic dogs ..., domestic cats ..., domesticated rodents and rabbits, captive-bred species of common cage birds, nonpoisonous snakes, fish, and turtles, traditionally kept in the home for pleasure rather than for commercial purposes, and racing pigeons

(2) A person may offer the species enumerated in paragraph (1) of this subsection to a public zoo, park, or museum for exhibition purposes.



What Does the Beekeeper Do, Anyway?

- *Intervene, rather than control:* your efforts can help, hurt, or be neutral, but the more you try to call the shots, the more the bees are likely to pay
- *The beekeeper is a manager* who attempts to understand the activities, history and needs of the society before her/him, and to take appropriate actions on its behalf
- *The bees are also partners* in human goals, and those goals shape beekeeping priorities for both bees and people
- *Get suckered in, mostly:* you'll be joining the ranks of philosophers, naturalists, poets, politicians, scientists, artists—people in the habit of thinking outside their own skins

Meet Your Co-Workers

One Big Happy Family of 50,000 at midsummer
(if things are on track!)

Mom, a.k.a. The Queen



.8 in or more

Population: 1 (usually)



About .5 in

Population: 48K (or so)

Brother, a.k.a. The Drone



.6-.7 in

Population: 2.5K (or less)

Keep in mind: we are working with bugs!

OK, More Specifically: The Beekeeper...

- *Decides why they want to keep bees*
- *Decides on which bees to keep*
- *Decides on where to keep them*
- *Decides which equipment to use*
- *Decides on an approach*
- *Decides whether to treat or not for pests, diseases*

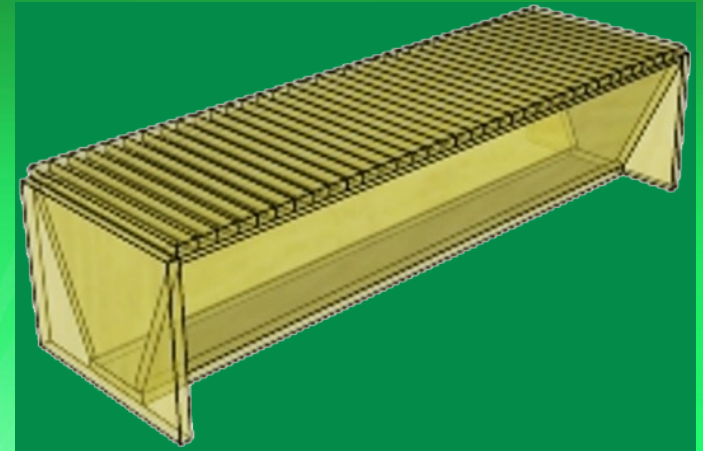
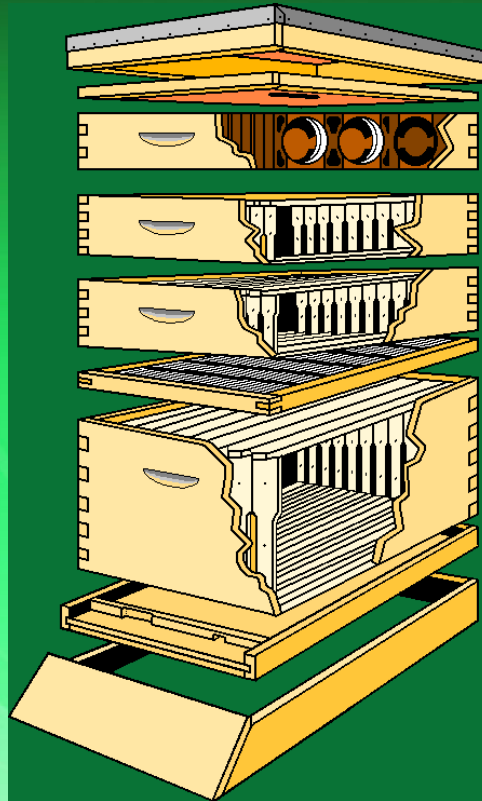
What's Different For the Urban Beekeeper?

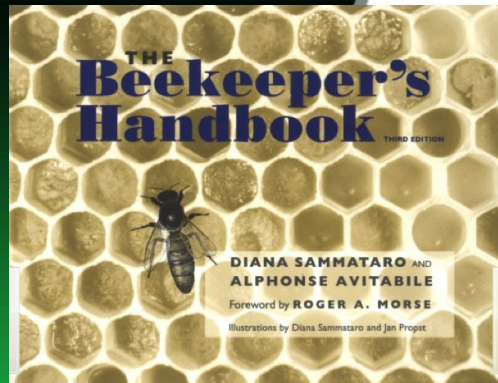
- *We live in a human-centered habitat, and people have to come first*
- *Hive locations may not be perfect*
- *Access to hives may be more restricted*
- *Unsure legal environment*
- *Public outreach/education is not optional*
- *The behavior of every beekeeper can have intense consequences for the rest*
- *We are only now organizing ourselves cooperatively*
- *Everybody thinks we are incredibly interesting (for good or ill!)*

A bit about gear

- Getting started costs: first year costs most, depending on choices, usually about \$500 for the first tools and hive and \$150+ for each additional
- I use Langstroth gear, many new organically-oriented beeks are interested in Top Bar Hives
- Most beekeeping supplies come from mail order houses, most now online
- Gear decisions usually made after you decide on whether to keep bees, where, how many, and in what type of equipment

Skep, Langstroth Hive and TBH Hive





How to get started

To survive their first year, hives in the MidAtlantic must be **started in early Spring** (April-May latest).

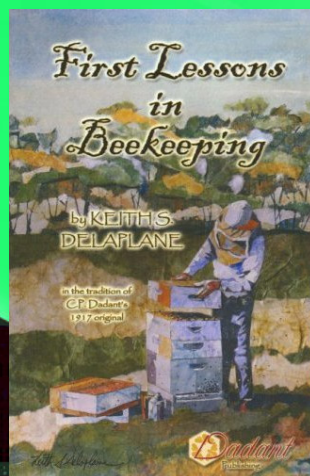
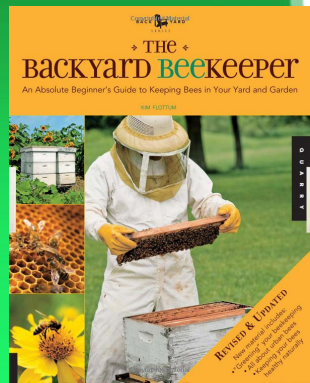
We usually get **one harvest** in mid-summer, **no harvest first year.**

Beekeeping course is essential for most: offered at low cost (\$50-\$80) starting in January (also on handouts)

- PG: www.bumbabees.com
- MontCo: www.montgomerycountbeekeepers.com
- NoVa: www.beekeepersnova.org
- DPR Public Beekeeping Program: email kelly.melsted@dc.gov

The Autumn and Winter is a great time to read up:

- *The Beekeepers Handbook*, Avitabile and Sammataro
- *The Backyard Beekeeper*, Kim Flottom
- *First Lessons in Beekeeping*, Keith Delaplane



Finally:

Web handouts at <http://citybees.blogspot.com>

- Local courses
- Bee plants for your garden
- Bee pollinated crops
- The local beekeeping calendar
- Stinging insect fear deflator flyer

Your questions (at the very end)

