

Caring for bees – factsheet



Beekeeping is becoming more popular in Wellington. Bees are important for pollinating crops and gardens but can cause problems in residential areas, so good hive management is important.

Beekeeping – the basics

Under the Wellington City Council **Animal Bylaw 2024**, properties in a residential area can only have up to four beehives on them without prior written permission from the Council. Beekeepers must ensure that there is enough food for all bees in the area and that bee numbers do not become a nuisance or intimidate neighbours. It is recommended you speak with neighbours before getting a hive.

Minimising nuisances

Flight path management

Bees tend to forage for nectar, pollen, and water within a 3 kilometre radius of the hive but can forage further when food and water are scarce. Hives should be positioned in a sheltered and sunny spot. Under the Animal Bylaw 2024, beekeepers must ensure that hives are positioned to avoid the flight path impinging on any neighbouring dwellings or living areas. Avoid placing hives close to a neighbour's house, driveway or near frequently used areas such as vegetable gardens, clotheslines, or children's play areas. In residential areas, the hive should be behind a 2-metre-high fence, trellis, or hedge so that the bees must fly up and above anyone walking around – especially your next-door neighbour.

Bees have small, round, waxy yellow droppings that are left in their flight path which can land on your neighbours' windows, cars, or washing. This may be fixed by turning the hive so that the entrance faces a different direction or moving it to another location on the section. Move the hive no more than 1-2 metres

per day otherwise bees may get lost. It's important that flightpaths are not directed across walkways.

Beekeeping associations can provide more advice about flight paths

Water

There must be water from a natural or provided source within several metres of the hive as stated in the Animal Bylaw 2024. This will reduce visits by thirsty bees to neighbours' wet washing, swimming pools, and bird baths. Provide water by letting a tap drip slowly into a shallow dish of sand or pebbles so bees won't drown when drinking.

Nectar/pollen

Bees need access to a variety of bee-friendly plants and trees close to the hive. The online database **Trees for Bees** provides information about good bee forage plants that will supply nectar and pollen to bees in New Zealand.

Swarm prevention

Swarming is the bee colony's natural means of reproducing itself. Beekeepers need to recognise when their bees are preparing to swarm to prevent it as colony swarms pose a risk to the public, your bees, other beekeepers, and bee biosecurity.

The most common method to prevent swarming is splitting the hive. Splitting the hive involves adding another box to the hive to create more space and work so the bees do not feel as congested. Other methods include re-queening on an annual basis, splitting a nucleus from populous hives, and re-queening colonies that have been started from swarms.

Community beekeeping

Permission is required to keep bees on any Council land, such as parks and reserves. Applications are assessed by the Council and may be granted subject to conditions. If your application is approved, you'll need to pay a fee. For more information, please see **section 12.1** in the Animal Bylaw 2024.

Legal requirements

It is not necessary to obtain a licence from the Council if you are keeping less than four beehives on private land in Wellington city. If you want to keep more than four beehives you will need to get prior written permission from the Council.

Beekeepers are legally required to register their apiary with the **AFB PMP Management Agency**. This is so all hives can be monitored for exotic pests and diseases, specifically targeting the elimination of American foulbrood in managed colonies in New Zealand. Beekeepers must display their Apiary Registration Number at each apiary (usually on each hive).

Colony loss

Colony loss over winter 2023 was estimated to be 12.7% which is statistically lower than the two previous years. To reduce colony loss:

- Ensure bees have enough food through winter and the beginning of spring.
 - Honey contains pollen which the bees will use.
 - In autumn, leave enough honey in the hive for the bees to eat through winter. There will be times the bees cannot forage due to bad weather.
 - If all the honey is consumed feed the hives with sugar syrup. Make sure there is plenty for the bees to store.
- Control varroa, an external mite that feeds on honeybees and their pupae with registered miticides in spring and autumn. Varroa was the most prominent cause of colony losses over both autumn and winter.
- Control wasps in the area with registered baits. Wasps can kill honeybee colonies that have reduced in size over winter and can't defend the pupae or winter stores.

Getting started with bees

The best way to test your liking for beekeeping is to gain practical experience before you get hives of your own. You can do this with an individual beekeeper or by joining the local beekeeping club. There are also a number of beekeeping courses you can complete.

Do not get hives on your property if you are not prepared to regularly manage and look after them. Neglected hives are a nuisance to the public and a potential source of bee diseases.

Hives will usually need to be checked or 'worked' by the beekeeper at least once every three weeks in summer and about once or twice over the winter months.

Beekeeper costs

To start beekeeping, you'll need:

- a protective suit (usually a one-piece that includes a veil).
- gumboots, gloves, a smoker, and hive tool.
- an initial hive with four boxes.
- a nucleus colony of bees with a new queen.
- Apiary Registration with the AFB PMP Management Agency.

You should be prepared to spend approximately \$1000 setting up your first hive. Two hives will cost approximately \$1650 in total to set up. It's recommended that you start with two nucleus colonies as an insurance against one queen failing. If this happens, you can unite the hives or swap broods between them.

Resolving issues

If your neighbour's bees have become a source of nuisance, we recommend you speak with them about the situation. Issues can usually be resolved the most quickly by dealing with your neighbour directly. If problems persist, please call us on **04 499 4444**.

Further information can be found on our *website*.

Further information:

- *Animal Bylaw 2024 - Plans, policies and bylaws - Wellington City Council*
- *Animal Welfare Act*
- Wellington Beekeepers Association beehive.org.nz
- American Foulbrood Pest Management Plan afb.org.nz
- Trees For Bees treesforbees.org.nz
- Apiculture NZ apinz.org.nz

**Absolutely Positively
Wellington City Council**

Me Heke Ki Pōneke