

Top 15 Mistakes *New Beekeepers Make*

Use this guide to avoid the top 15 most common beekeeping mistakes. They are ranked by the colony's ability to survive the mistake.

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15

Mistake #15. Not ordering your bee suit in time. Order your bee suit in advance so it is ready for you to wear the day you pick up your bees. We have seen colonies fail because the beekeeper was waiting for a bee suit and the hive had queen trouble. By the time they got the suit and did their first inspection, it was too late.

14

Mistake #14. Placing the hive near a high-traffic area of your yard. Place the hive away from playgrounds, sidewalks, driveways, etc.

13

Mistake #13. Storing extra equipment in warm, dark areas. This encourages pests like wax moths and mice to move into the hive. Store unused equipment in cold, light-filled areas.

12

Mistake #12. Inspecting bees at the wrong time of day or in the wrong kind of weather. The best time to inspect bees is during midday in sunny weather, when they are busily flying. This leaves fewer bees at home to work with. The bees have their mind on other things besides you, the intruder. I suppose the reason that many beekeepers think it's best to get in the hive in the evening or on a rainy day is because the bees aren't active. Bees are actually more aggressive when they are all at home with nothing to do. Any intruder at that time will gain the bees' full focus.

11

Mistake #11. Not using an appropriate amount of smoke at the appropriate time. Take care not to trigger aggressive bee behavior needlessly, especially close to neighbors, pets, and kids. Using smoke appropriately will prevent this. The time to start your smoker is before you get in the beehive, not after the bees are already mad. Give a few small puffs of smoke in the entrance to throw off the guard bees and wait for about a minute before opening the lid. If you are looking for the queen bee, you want very little smoke, just enough to throw off the guard bees, but not a heavy amount inside the hive.

10

Mistake #10. Ignoring your hive. Ideally, beekeepers need to check their bees every 7-10 days seasonally. Look for eggs and brood, and to see if they need additional room in the hive. Look for signs of disease, queen cells, swarm cells, honey and pollen stores, etc.

9

Mistake #9. Leaving full frames of honey, during harvest, outdoors where other bees can rob them. After removing frames of honey from the hive, move them to a bee-tight place. That will prevent bees from taking it back to their hive, and bees from other hives from robbing the honey.

8

Mistake #8. Assuming that you need a new queen because you can't find her. The queen is very important in the hive, but many new beekeepers waste time and money on new queens when the one they have is fine. Seeing eggs, one per cell, indicates that the queen is active. There are normal times when the queen stops laying eggs, like in the fall when the queen takes a break for winter, or with virgin queens. Most of the year, being able to see eggs in the cells is the best indicator of how well the queen is doing.

7

Mistake #7. Skipping the bottom box during inspections. Once beekeepers add supers, they may neglect looking in the bottom box at the brood chamber. You need to know what is going on the bottom box.

6

Mistake #6. Not monitoring for varroa mites. Test bees for mites at least spring and fall for varroa mites using a sugar roll or other method. Knowing how many mites are in the hive will help influence treatment decisions.

5

Mistake #5. Not correcting cross-combing early enough. This is common in foundationless hives, like top bar hives. Correcting this early means cutting small pieces of comb with your hive tool and putting them back into place. Leaving it until later can make it impossible to remove frames from the hive.

4

Mistake #4. Not giving bees room for expansion. Keeping ahead of bees' need for additional space helps to prevent swarming and provides space for expansion of the brood chamber and surplus honey. In a Langstroth hive, add a super when bees start working on the last two frames. Prime the bees to move into the second box by moving a drawn comb into the upper box. Replace a new frame into the space left by moving the drawn comb.

3

Mistake #3. Not being able to recognize eggs. Recognizing eggs allows beekeepers to know that the queen is actively laying eggs in the hive, even if you can't find her. She should be laying one egg per cell. Look online for photos of eggs so you can recognize them in your hive.

2

Mistake #2. Improperly introducing the queen. After hiving a new package, check to make sure the queen is out of her queen cage and laying eggs. A queen with a package should be released quickly, not slowly (as with requeening later in the hive's lifecycle). Often when a queen is not introduced properly, you can replace her quickly and save the colony.

1

Mistake #1. Not feeding a new package (or swarm). Feed a new package with sugar syrup until there is a sufficient nectar flow. Stop feeding when there is an abundance of flowers and sunny weather. If some of the bees return with pollen on their back legs, others are most likely gathering nectar. Lift the hive to see if it's gaining weight.