

FREE STARTER EDITION

Beginners Beekeeping Guide



The Bees & The Basics

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WELCOME

Your first steps into beekeeping

A free starter edition of the Brother Bee Beginners Beekeeping Guide – written for South African beekeepers and the African honey bee.

Thank you for downloading this guide. If you have ever watched bees working a flower, rescued a swarm, or wondered how honey reaches the jar, you are in the right place.

Most beekeeping information online was written for European bees in cold northern climates. South Africa is different. Our bees are indigenous, fast, productive and famously defensive, and our seasons follow the rain. This starter edition gives you the foundations you need to decide whether beekeeping is for you, and to avoid the mistakes that cost most beginners their first colonies.

IN THIS FREE EDITION

- Why bees matter
- South Africa's two honey bees – and the law
- How a colony works
- Five things to do before you start
- Your starter kit
- Getting your first bees
- Stings and first aid
- The beekeeping year at a glance
- What to do if you find bees

IN THE FULL GUIDE AND COURSE

- 23 chapters and 66 pages
- Hive inspections, step by step
- Swarming, absconding, pests, diseases and predators
- Harvesting, food-safety law and labelling
- Beeswax, honey and health, and income streams
- Printable record sheets and checklists
- 34 verified sources
- Video lessons showing every tool in use



Tshepo Toddy Seboko

Founder, Brother Bee ZA · Rustenburg, North West

© 2026 Brother Bee ZA. You are welcome to share this free edition in full and unchanged. Photographs are Brother Bee ZA field photographs; the bee-line map is from the Department of Agriculture. This guide is educational and does not replace hands-on training, medical or legal advice. If someone stung has difficulty breathing or swelling of the face or throat, call **10177** or **112** from a mobile phone.



LESSON 01

01

Why Bees Matter

Honey is the reward. Pollination is the reason bees matter to every person who eats.

Bees carry pollen from flower to flower, which is how many plants set fruit and seed. The western honey bee is the most widely managed pollinator in the world, so it is the one farmers can bring to a crop when they need it^[1].

87 of 115

leading global food crops benefit, to some degree, from animal pollination^[2]

≈35%

of global food production by volume comes from crops that depend on pollinators^[2]

1 in 3

mouthfuls — a fair everyday summary of that 35% figure

In South Africa, bee pollination supports deciduous fruit, macadamias, avocados, pumpkins and melons, and sunflower and canola seed production. And every colony a beekeeper rescues from a wall or a water meter is a colony that was not poisoned.

Why a beekeeper matters

A well-managed apiary does three things at once. It produces food and materials people value — honey, wax and propolis. It provides pollination for farms and gardens. And it gives bees that turn up in the wrong place somewhere safe to go.

In South Africa many people still reach for insecticide when bees move into a roof. The beekeeper is often the difference between a colony's survival and its destruction.



A frame of capped honey lifted during a Brother Bee inspection.

MYTH VS FACT

“Without bees, humans would starve within four years.” There is no evidence Einstein said this, and staple grains such as maize and wheat are wind-pollinated. The real cost of losing pollinators is poorer nutrition and lower yields of fruit, nuts and vegetables — serious enough without exaggeration^[1, 2].

LESSON 02

02

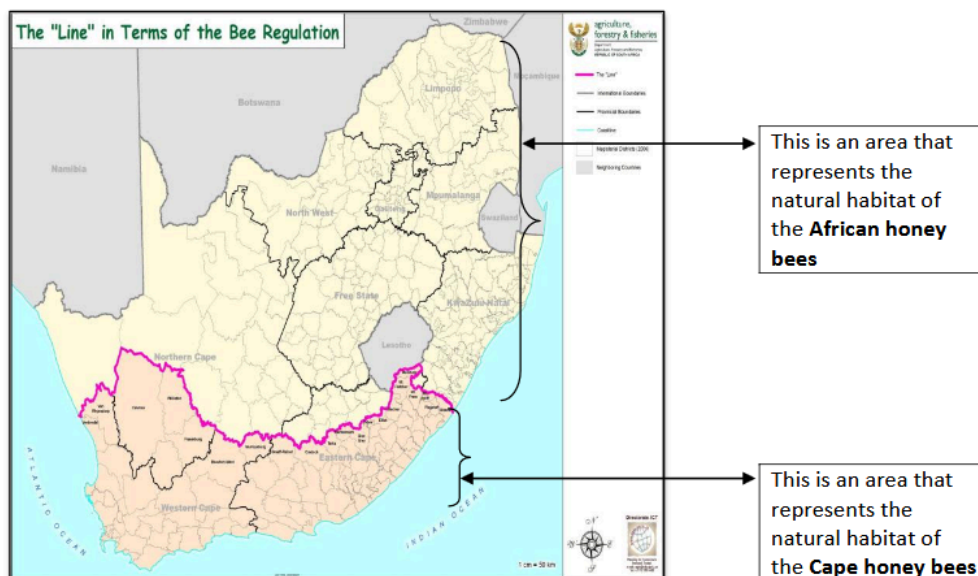
South Africa's Two Honey Bees

Our honey bees are indigenous – and keeping the two subspecies apart is the law.

South Africa has the **African honey bee** (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) across most of the country, and the **Cape honey bee** (*A. m. capensis*) in the fynbos region of the south-western and southern Cape^[3,4].

	AFRICAN HONEY BEE	CAPE HONEY BEE
Where	Most of SA, including all of North West, Gauteng and Limpopo	Fynbos region of the Western Cape and southern coast
Temperament	Highly defensive; swarms and absconds readily	Generally calmer to handle
Special trait	Fast build-up; the commercial bee of most of the country	Workers can lay female eggs without mating – and can take over African bee colonies

The South African Map indicating natural habitats of the Cape and African honey bees divided by the pink line



The official dividing line between the two bees, published by the Department of Agriculture^[5].



THE LAW IN SOUTH AFRICA

Under the Control Measures relating to honey-bees (**R.858**), no one may move or keep Cape bees north of the line, or African bees south of it, without written approval^[5,6]. Every beekeeper — hobbyist, commercial or bee removal service — must also **register with the Department of Agriculture**. Registration is free^[6,7].



IN THE FULL GUIDE · CHAPTER 2 AND CHAPTER 15

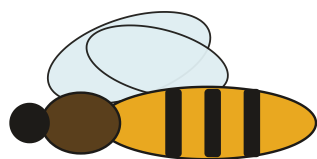
- The *capensis* calamity: how Cape bee workers spread across north-eastern South Africa
- How to recognise Cape bee workers in your own hives — and what to do

LESSON 03

03

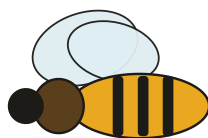
How a Colony Works

A single bee cannot survive alone. The colony — thousands of bees acting as one — is the living unit you manage.



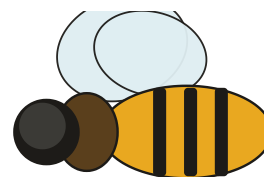
Queen

long abdomen · one per colony



Worker

smallest · thousands



Drone

stout · huge eyes · no sting

The three kinds of bee in a colony, drawn to approximate relative size.



The queen is normally the only egg-layer. She mates early in life and stores sperm for the rest of her life; at peak season she can lay in the region of 1 500 eggs a day^[8].

Workers are females that do every job — cleaning, nursing, building, guarding and foraging — changing roles as they age. In the active season a worker lives about five to six weeks^[8].

Drones are males. They have no sting and exist only to mate with a queen from another colony.



The queen, marked with a green dot so she is easier to find.

BROTHER BEE TIP

You do not need to see the queen at every inspection. **Fresh eggs** — single, standing upright in the cell — prove a laying queen was present within the last three days.

LESSON 04

04

Five Things to Do Before You Start

Most beginner failures are decided before the first colony arrives.

1

Register as a beekeeper

Free registration with the Department of Agriculture is required by law for every beekeeper and bee removal service^[6, 7].

2

Check local rules and talk to your neighbours

Many municipalities restrict keeping bees in residential areas. For most beginners with African bees, a rural site well away from homes is safer than a back garden.

3

Know your own risk

If you or a helper has ever had a strong reaction to a sting, speak to a doctor before you start.

4

Be honest about the commitment

A short inspection every one to two weeks in season, a full season of hands-on learning, and transport that can carry hives safely.



5 Commit to ethical beekeeping

Protect honey badgers with stands and straps — never trap or poison them. Never kill a colony you could relocate.



IN THE FULL GUIDE · CHAPTERS 6 AND 9

- Exactly what the registration covers and how renewal works
- How to choose an apiary site: forage, water, shade, safety and a landowner agreement
- The full site checklist

LESSON 05

05

Your Starter Kit

Buy what you need to work safely and keep bees well. Add the rest as you grow.

ITEM	WHY YOU NEED IT
Full bee suit with veil	With African bees, a full suit is the minimum. Light colours; strong zips.
Gloves and boots	Leather or thick nitrile gloves; gumboots with trousers tucked in.
Smoker and fuel	Cool white smoke calms the colony. Dry grass, cow dung or hessian work well.
Hive tool	Lever apart boxes and frames that bees glue together with propolis.
Langstroth hive(s)	The South African standard: removable frames you can inspect and harvest.
Stand and straps	Keeps hives off the ground and away from ants and honey badgers ^[9] .

Dress for African bees

- Wear light colours. Bees react more to dark, fuzzy textures that resemble their natural predators.
- Avoid perfume, scented soaps and hair products. Wash your suit regularly — old venom on fabric is an alarm signal.
- Check zips, seams and the veil before every visit, and carry duct tape for quick repairs.
- Remove rings and watches; a sting on a finger can swell quickly.



Using the smoker

Light the smoker before you walk to the hives and aim for cool, dense, white smoke — never flames or thin, hot smoke. Give a few gentle puffs at the entrance, wait about a minute, then lift the lid and puff lightly underneath. Use as little smoke as you need: more smoke does not mean calmer bees.

SAFETY FIRST

Do not buy second-hand hives or combs unless you know exactly where they came from. American foulbrood spores survive for decades in old comb and woodwork^[10].



IN THE FULL GUIDE · CHAPTERS 7 AND 10 + VIDEO LESSONS

- The complete starter kit, and what can wait until your first harvest
- A safe hive inspection, step by step — and video lessons showing every tool in use

LESSON 06

06

Getting Your First Bees

In South Africa you rarely need to buy bees. Swarms are plentiful in spring.

Most South African beekeepers start by catching a swarm in a **bait hive**: a box set up to attract scout bees looking for a new home. Swarms prefer a dark, dry cavity of roughly 40 litres with a small entrance, raised off the ground^[11] — about the size of one Langstroth brood box.

Setting a bait hive in four steps

1

Time it right

Set bait hives from late winter, before the spring swarm season (in the Highveld, typically from August), and again as summer rains bring a second wave.

2

Make it smell like home

Use a brood box with a few frames and one piece of old, clean, disease-free comb. A little beeswax or propolis rubbed inside helps.

3

Place it well

Shaded, sheltered, raised off the ground where you can reach it safely, and away from where people walk.

4

Check weekly

Bees carrying pollen into the box mean the swarm has moved in and the queen is laying.



THE MOVING RULE

Foragers remember the exact position of their hive. Move a colony **less than one metre** or **several kilometres** — never in between — and always at night, when every bee is home.



IN THE FULL GUIDE · CHAPTER 8

- How and when to set bait hives, including scent lures
- Questions to ask before buying a colony
- Why building removals are not a beginner's job

LESSON 07

07

Stings and First Aid

A sting is part of the job. Knowing the difference between a normal reaction and an emergency could save a life.

Remove a sting fast. How you remove it matters much less than how quickly — the longer it stays in, the more venom is delivered^[12]. Then step away from the hive and smoke the area to mask the alarm scent.

REACTION	SIGNS	ACTION
Normal	Pain, redness, small swelling that settles within hours	Wash, cold compress; ask a pharmacist about an antihistamine
Emergency	Hives over the body, swelling of face or throat, difficulty breathing, dizziness or fainting	Call 10177 or 112 now. Use a prescribed adrenaline auto-injector

IF MANY BEES ATTACK

Run in a straight line, cover your face, and get into a building or vehicle. Do not jump into water — the bees will wait for you to surface.

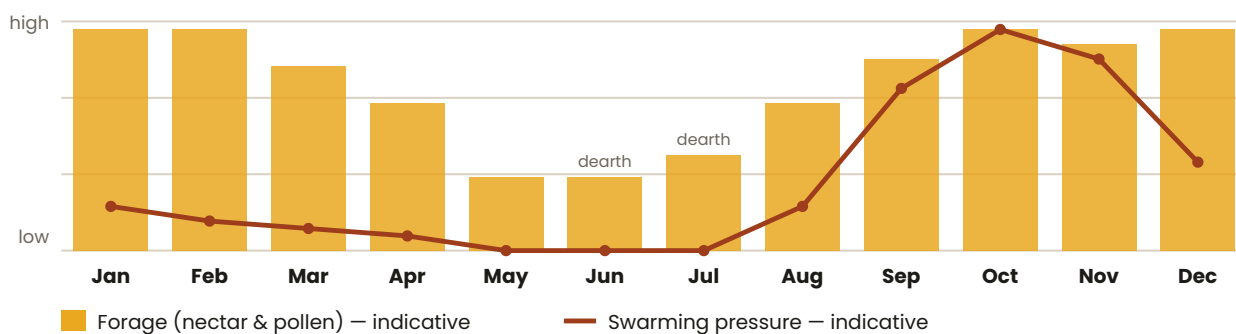


LESSON 08

08

The Beekeeping Year at a Glance

Beekeeping follows the flowers, and the flowers follow the rain.



Indicative pattern for summer-rainfall inland areas such as Rustenburg. Timing varies with rainfall, altitude and local flora.

SEASON	KEY JOBS
Late winter · Aug	Check stores; feed only if colonies are light; set bait hives.
Spring · Sep–Nov	Main swarm season. Give space early; catch swarms; add supers.
Summer · Dec–Mar	Main flows after rain. Shade and water; harvest only capped surplus.
Autumn · Apr–May	Leave enough honey for winter; reduce entrances.
Winter · Jun–Jul	Minimal disturbance; repair equipment; plan next season.



IN THE FULL GUIDE · CHAPTERS 12–15

- The full month-by-month calendar and Western Cape differences
- Feeding, water, swarming and absconding
- Pests, diseases and predators — including why Varroa is not the threat here that it is overseas



LESSON 09

09

Found Bees? Here's What to Do

Share this page. It saves bees – and it keeps people safe.

IF YOU FIND BEES

- 1 Keep your distance**
Move people, children and pets away. Close nearby windows and doors.
- 2 Do not disturb them**
No spraying, hosing, smoking or stoning. Disturbance turns calm bees defensive.
- 3 Never seal them in**
Sealing or poisoning a colony leaves rotting comb and honey behind – and attracts the next swarm.
- 4 Call a registered bee removal service**
Ask for their registration number, and whether they relocate rather than exterminate.

Are swarms dangerous?

A swarm resting on a branch or wall has no brood or honey to defend, so it is usually far less defensive than an established colony. It is simply waiting while scouts find a new home, and it often moves on within hours or a few days.

“Usually” matters: a hungry swarm, or one that has been sprayed, hosed or poked, can sting. Once bees have moved into a wall, roof or meter box, they are an established colony and removal becomes skilled work.



A swarm resting on a wall while scouts search for a new home.



Bees in the wrong place? We relocate. We don't kill.

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YOUR NEXT STEP

Ready to keep bees properly?

This starter edition shows you where to begin. The official guide and course take you the rest of the way – from your first swarm to your first labelled jar.

WHO IT IS FOR

New and aspiring beekeepers, farmers and landowners who want bees on their property, and anyone who wants to understand bees before they start.

WHY BROTHER BEE

Written for the bee you will actually keep. Every factual claim checked against published sources. No equipment upselling: start small and grow as your skills grow.

	FREE EDITION	OFFICIAL GUIDE
Pages and chapters	14 · 9 lessons	66 · 23 chapters
South African bees and the law	Overview	Complete
Step-by-step hive inspections	—	✓
Swarming, absconding, pests, diseases and predators	—	✓
Harvesting, extraction and honey-labelling law	—	✓
Beeswax, honey and health, income streams	—	✓
Printable checklists and record sheets	—	✓
Glossary and 34 verified references	—	✓
Video lessons	—	✓ (course)



Enrol in the Brother Bee Beginners Course

Get the complete Beginners Beekeeping Guide together with video lessons that show every tool and technique in use. Built for the African honey bee and South African conditions, by a working beekeeping business in Rustenburg.

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Follow us on TikTok @brotherbeesa for live sessions, removals and behind-the-scenes beekeeping.

SOURCES

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FREE STARTER EDITION

Liked this? The full guide and course take you from first swarm to first harvest.

Enrol in the Brother Bee Beginners Course for the complete 66-page guide, printable record sheets and video lessons.



Saving Bees, Sweetening Lives

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