Apiary Site Selection

Bee School 2016
Choosing a place is comparable to finding a home for yourself.

Sort out what you want against what is possible.

It will always be a compromise.

Hopefully we will help you make a good choice and avoid some of the pitfalls.

Good Luck!
Factors to be considered in selecting an Apiary site:

- Will the site cause a nuisance to neighbors or the general public? Is it safe from vandals?
- Is there forage for the honeybees? Are there any apiaries nearby?
- Is the environment of the site suitable for bees?
- Is there convenient access, with minimal carrying for the beekeeper to bring in equipment and remove honey supers?
- Is the space suitable for the number of hives?
Apiary Site Selection

Consideration for the public

- The general public is often ignorant and frightened.
- If they become alarmed about the beehives, their complaints can result in your bees being considered a ‘nuisance’ with the consequent loss of apiary sites for yourself and other beekeepers.
- Bees establish regular ‘flight paths’ en route to adjacent forage.
- Enclosing an apiary with hedges or a trellis is good practice.
- Also reduces the visibility of beekeeper activity.
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Consideration for the public

- Avoid sites which border roads or public paths.
- Keep only good-tempered bees. Culling bad tempered stock and replace.
- Damage to hives from thieves and vandals can occur.
- Out of sight out of mind is a good maxim.
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Forage

- Honeybees mostly forage for nectar and pollen within 2-3 miles.
- An apiary site may be permanent or temporary to exploit a crop or seasonal sources.
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Forage

- Farmland may provide an excellent source for a month.
- Gardens are usually planted with flowering plants, shrubs and trees that bloom from April to September.
- An apiary within flying range of these but sited in an area of low population density can be ideal.
Avoid low areas and hill tops

Good wind break

Cold air settles

High wind exposure

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- **Forage**
  - Find out the location and size of other apiaries that provide competition for forage.
  - Talk to members of your local association.
  - Generally no problems with small numbers of hives and vast farm crops but field margins and gardens provide much smaller though continuous forage.
  - It is sensible not to compete with large beekeepers.
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Environment

- The hives should be sheltered from the prevailing wind, so that foragers can land easily at the hive entrance and roofs are not blown off in gales. Avoid sites open to cold northerly or easterly wind.
- A generally southerly aspect will provide warm and dry conditions, especially helpful in winter.
- Avoid sites in a frost pocket, which will affect spring development, or on low or damp ground that could become flooded.
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Environment

- Sites under trees are unsuitable because they are usually damp.
- The area should be fenced from livestock that may kick over hives.
- Bees need water. If this is not naturally available then consideration should be given to providing a suitable source, away from the main flight paths to avoid fouling.
- You may find it helpful to discuss potential sites with your local bee inspector, who can advise if there are any disease problems in the area.
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Access

Convenient access is essential.

- Easy movement of equipment in and out of the apiary.
- Adding and removing supers, controlling swarming, feeding and treating the colonies is not physically demanding or hazardous.
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Access

Do not consider a site that entails climbing fences or crossing ditches to enter. It is ideal to have vehicular access right up to the hives when necessary. Remember, dry grassland may become impassable mud in wet weather.

A level site is easier to manage
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Space

- It is sensible to increase the number of hives envisioned, by at least two to allow for contingencies.
- Then make measurements and a rough plan of the site to confirm that you will have sufficient space.
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Space

Guidelines when making the plan:
- Easy access to manipulate the colonies without working in the flight paths.
- Work the frames in the hive across your body from where you plan to stand.
- Space to stack the removed supers and roof without the beekeeper moving away from the hive.
- Placing the hives on stands about 12-15 inches above the grounds makes for a comfortable working height for the beekeeper.
- It is better to put more distance between your hives.
Finding the site

Establishing good relationship with neighbors, local farmers, landowners and the general public is a major factor in finding and maintaining a successful site for your bees.

Talk to them about the value of bees as pollinators; educate them about swarms, flight paths etc. Try to capture their interest and co-operation, gaining respect for the bees and the beekeeper.

Most beekeepers are tempted by the familiar and convenient location of their own garden, but small gardens, particularly those surrounded by houses are not likely to be a successful solution. With careful management a small garden in open countryside or a garden at least the size of a tennis court could provide a suitable site for two or three hives.
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*Situations to avoid*
- A small suburban garden, adjacent to areas where children play may cause instant complaints.
- A cloud of roaring bees swarming into a neighbor’s garden.
- Bees drinking at neighbor’s birdbaths or garden ponds.
- Bees soiling the neighbors wash as they make their cleansing flights in early spring.
- A hive on a flat and possibly slippery roof accessible either by ladder or through an upstairs window!
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[Image of a person in protective gear working with bee hives]