

---

# Safe Urban Beekeeping

---

*Urban beekeeping doesn't have to be a scary experience for you and your neighbors. By taking precautions, your bees can thrive within city limits.*

By Deb Buehler



*To stay protected when handling bees, beekeepers should wear a protective suit, including a veil, gloves, long sleeves and pants.*

From the White House lawn near First Lady Michelle Obama's kitchen garden to apartment balconies and postage-stamp-sized urban backyards, beekeepers are caring for bee hives and educating neighbors about the benefits of bees.

Danny Slabaugh, president of the Michiana Beekeepers Association in Elkhart, Ind., describes strategies urban beekeepers should take to ensure the safety of themselves and their neighbors.

## Urban Beekeeper Safety

Urban beekeepers protect themselves by wearing a veil, gloves, long-sleeved shirts and long pants, or a one-piece coverall and a smoker. Regularly checking a bee hive's progress ensures the hive's strength and health. During these checks, beekeepers observe for new brood; storage of water, pollen and honey; and individual bee health indicators, from **mites** to misshapen wing development. They also monitor the space available for the laying queen.

Urban beekeepers of all experience levels can continue to build their beekeeping safety skills by joining a local beekeeping association. Local and state-level beekeeping organizations distribute

online information as well as newsletters, which provide an extensive source of information specific to regional beekeeping concerns.

Beekeeping-association meetings and **beekeeping conferences** provide opportunities for urban beekeepers to learn about safe beekeeping practices and other concerns from guest speakers as well as a ready network of other beekeepers with which to share experiences. Beekeepers compare notes about the most docile strains of bees and recommendations for reputable beekeepers selling queens, nuc hives or packages.

### **Ensuring Neighbors' Safety**

“There are two schools of thought about how to work with urban neighbors,” says Slabaugh. “Some choose not to tell anyone about their hive until or unless there is a complaint. Others are up front about their beekeeping, providing the salve of fresh honey and openly addressing misconceptions about Honey bees.”

A smart beekeeper will take proactive approaches to reduce neighbors' bee concerns. For example, if weather is dry, Honey bees will use a neighbor's **swimming pool** as a water source. Erecting a **bird bath** or other water supply near the bee-hive entrance will reduce the likelihood that bees will become a poolside nuisance.

Choosing the bee hive's location carefully will reduce safety concerns as well. For example, bee hives shouldn't be placed near sidewalks or play areas where bee air traffic may pose a threat. Instead, the urban hive should be tucked into the corner of a yard away from regular human activity.

Urban beekeepers can help direct the flight pattern of their Honey bees by installing a section of 6- to 8-foot-tall privacy fence 6 feet in front of the hive entrance. Bees leaving the hive will fly up and over the fence achieving a height where they will not encounter children playing or a neighbor working in the yard.

Hive swarms are nearly impossible to predict or prevent. Some beekeepers will take a precaution of setting up a bait hive. A bait hive is an empty hive that can be easily accessed and claimed by a bee swarm, reducing the risk of swarming bees in a neighbor's tree.

Some urban beekeepers keep an extra pair of gloves, veil and coverall in order to invite curious neighbors for a bee-hive inspection. Creating educational opportunities can go a long way to dispelling safety concerns about Honey bees.