



Factsheet

Bees for development *Bee House*

The **Bees for development** *Bee House* is a nest box for honey bees. The *Bee House* provides the right sized cavity for an *Apis mellifera* honey bee colony to build its nest and live naturally. The *Bee House* replicates a hollow tree and simply provides a nesting space for honey bees.

Inside the box is a cavity of just the right size for a honey bee colony to build its nest. The space inside has a flat ceiling, with a loft space insulated with wood shavings. The flat ceiling of the box is where the honey bees will attach their combs. The combs are built from beeswax and these are where the honey bees will live, and will rear their brood (young bees), and store their food (nectar being converted into honey, and pollen). The bees' only entrance to the box is by the floor at the front.

How to get bees to live in the box

During the honey bee swarming season, if there are existing honey bee colonies in the area, scout honey bees may begin examining the box entrance, and going inside to 'measure up'. If the scout bees judge the box to be a good nesting place, a swarm of honey bees may arrive in the next few days.

The *Bee House* is already rubbed inside with beeswax to create a 'bee friendly' aroma. Bees may be further encouraged to settle in the *Bee House* by rubbing around the entrance with beeswax, or by a few drops of essential oil, lemongrass or other herbal oil to attract the scout bees.

Is it possible to harvest honey?

No. This *Bee House* simply provides a nesting place for a honey bee colony. If you want to harvest honey from bees - then you need to keep them in a different type of beehive.

Can I open the box?

No. The bees will build their nest attached to the ceiling (and maybe the walls) of the box. They will seal up all cracks and gaps with propolis (resins that they collect from plants). The bees will keep it clean inside.

What about honey bee diseases?

By helping to increase the population of honey bees, we are helping to restore and maintain the genetic diversity of honey bee populations. Honey bees are evolving to survive in the presence of *Varroa*, and the greater the population of honey bees, the greater the genetic pool to develop tolerance to the mite.



The Bee House

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How to situate the Bee House

Providing a good place for the box is the hardest part! The empty box weighs 10kg. When occupied by a honey bee colony it weighs up to 30kg. Therefore, it must be situated in a very safe and secure place. The box should be positioned 3-5 metres above ground level, which will make it more attractive for honey bees to occupy. Ideally, it will be sheltered from strong winds and shaded from too much sun.

We have found the *Bee House* works well in a tree, on a flat roof, on a balcony or with strong fixings, on the wall of a building. It could be on a stand on the ground.

A honey bee colony needs to build its nest inside a cavity. In nature, honey bees usually nest in cavities in trees and rocks. They can live also inside a hive provided by a beekeeper.

Yet nowadays there are increasingly few old, hollow trees: wild honey bee colonies tend therefore to build their nests inside building cavities and chimneys, and are too frequently perceived as a 'nuisance'.

World renowned scientist, Professor Tom Seeley endorses the *Bee House*:

"Throughout the honey bee's vast range of Europe, western Asia, and Africa, honey bees live both as managed colonies in man-made hives and as wild colonies in natural cavities. The *Bee House* designed by

Bees for development matches the housing preferences of European honey bees, so by mounting one on a tree or building, you will help sustain the population of wild honey bee colonies in your region."

Professor Thomas D. Seeley, *Horace White Professor in Biology Department of Neurobiology and Behavior, Cornell University, USA.*

Bees for development *Bee Houses* are being built in the UK by E H Thorne (Beehives) Ltd. and by prisoners at Channings Wood Prison.

Fact sheets published by Bees for development are a key part of our Learning and Knowledge Programme. Our intention is that all beekeepers and organisations that support them have access to the information they need to build sustainable beekeeping livelihoods and know how to use and care for our environment wisely.

Please use this information in the education of others and acknowledge **Bees for development**.