

## Raising Honey Bees

By Christine Randall

The *Apis bee*, otherwise known as the “honeybee,” is distinguishable by its production and storage of honey. This is also where we get the word “apiary,” which means “a collection of beehives.”

I wasn't raised on a farm—actually quite far from it in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Growing up, I always loved visiting my dad's family in Augusta, Georgia. They had the closest thing to a farm that ever I experienced. They had a pond, a cow, a vegetable garden, chickens, and hunting dogs. I have often thought someday I would move to the country and have a farm, but that hasn't happened yet. In fact, I'm still right here in Dania Beach, Florida.

Recently, I went to T.Y. Park to reserve a pavilion for our church picnic. As I waited in the office to make my reservation, I perused the many brochures of classes and events that Broward County Parks has to offer. And there it was—“Backyard Garden Series.” Though I could kill a silk plant, I have always longed to have a garden which would bring me one step closer to my country farm! Right there on that brochure was information on a seminar called “Backyard Beekeeping.”

*Wouldn't that be fun!* I thought to myself. *I do love honey.*

About a month later, I attended that information session on beekeeping. A gentleman from the University of Florida, School of Agriculture, spoke on the fascinating aspects and importance of beekeeping. I learned that beekeeping is not important just for the honey extraction, but it is also important for agricultural growth. In other words, our world needs honey bees to help pollinate our food supply!

I was hooked! I wanted to immediately get a bee hive. I didn't know where to begin. And the start-up cost for one hive was around \$400. Around that time, September 2013, I was preparing to go on a mission trip to Guatemala with my church for Thanksgiving. I had tickets to a football game and thought it would be nice to meet and get to know one of the new ladies at church who was going on the trip with us. She came to my house before the game. I was showing her around and as we looked in the backyard, I said, “And that's where I am going to put my bee hive!” A huge smile came across her face and she said, “Oh my goodness! I've always wanted a bee hive.” And that is how Cindy Todd and I became friends and backyard beekeeping partners!

Since Cindy lived in an apartment complex, she was not able to put a hive at her place. We decided to get a hive together and split costs. We keep it in my backyard. We then attended our first monthly meeting of the Broward Beekeepers Association. We met several people who were more than happy to help us on our way to backyard beekeeping. We were lucky enough to meet our new friends, Harry and Pam, who have two hives in their backyard and live near me. They graciously agreed to be our mentors and still are today. We also obtained free bees (pun intended) for our starter hive. We had our hive inspected by the Florida Department of Entomology and we are now registered beekeepers.

Now, I want to tell everyone about bees! While I was on the mission trip in Guatemala, I told everyone and anyone who would listen about the life of bees and my beehive! I even tried to tell the children and their parents in Spanish, with the help of an interpreter.

Today our hive is strong and thriving. In July 2014, we extracted our first batch of honey. We got 22 pounds of honey! That's about 2 gallons or 16 pints. We had so many people wanting our honey that we had to fill a bunch of half-pint jars. We sold out right away.

In August, we attended the South Florida Bee College at the University of Florida campus in Davie. Our honey received a "Commendable" Award! We learned so much about the nature of bees and their society and what they do for our food supply.

As far as maintenance of our hive, they are really very self-sufficient. In fact, they (and ants) are insects that have a social community and work for the good of the colony. They exhibit temporal polyethism—which means age-related division of labor. They change jobs as they grow older and as different glands develop. They gradually move towards the entrance of the hive as their jobs progress.

We do check it two or three times per month. We need to make sure that mites or ants are not trying to take over. We even check to make sure that viral or bacterial infections are not contaminating the hive.

We always pray first and wear protective gear when going into our hive. I have been stung before; and it hurts! It feels like a sharp hot poker. The honey bee, when it stings you, leaves the stinger in which continues to pump venom. You should not go in your hive if it is overcast and looks like rain as the bees become quite agitated when the weather is like that. And, always have Benadryl on hand.

It has been about a year since we entered the wonderful world of beekeeping. Recently, I purchased an "observation hive." This is a functioning five-frame hive that allows for an easy adjustment to contain the bees in their natural environment. It also provides a window into their colony. We have now created a new hive by splitting our thriving hive and placing two of the frames in the new observation hive.

Our plan is to use this new hive as an exhibit to introduce children in churches, homeschool groups, synagogues, libraries, and schools to the amazing lives of bees. This hive I hope to take to churches, homeschool groups, and private schools, and teach the children and teachers, all about the wondrous activity of the bees.

For further information, please email us at [ContactJustBelieve@Gmail.com](mailto:ContactJustBelieve@Gmail.com) ~ where we hope to provide bee education and products and even the Word of God.

Chrissy Randall was born and raised in south Florida. She's a proud parent of two young adults and active in many ministries at Lighthouse Community Church. She enjoys a variety of hobbies, including scuba diving, camping, volleyball, and backyard beekeeping!