

Our First Year Beekeeping Experience

Mark & Milisa Suckow

Our New Bees

We decided to start with two hives. We each had a hive. We received our two packages of bees on 4/2/22.



Missing Queens

- ▶ Milisa's Hive - first check after queen released, no queen. Did I kill her when I was releasing her? Did the bees kill her? Did she fly away when I released her?
- ▶ Mark's Hive - No queen first part of July, did she swarm?



Mentor

- ▶ We decided to work with a mentor to provide us additional guidance and support.
- ▶ Mentor came to our apiary five times during our first year:
 - ▶ First visit - one week after we released our queens. She marked our queens and reviewed how the hive was doing. She identified the queen was missing in Milisa's hive. Not sure we would have understood so soon we had a missing queen.
 - ▶ Mite Treatment - first part of June to treat with oxalic acid dribble.
 - ▶ Harvest Honey - Milisa's hive did have enough honey to harvest.
 - ▶ Mite Check - first of October to conduct the powdered sugar roll.
 - ▶ Mite Treatment - first of December to treat with oxalic acid dribble and make sure we had everything completed for the winter.

Importance of Local Bee Meetings

- ▶ Attend your local bee meetings - great way to learn and connect with other beekeepers. This is how we found our mentor.
- ▶ Attend NEKBA Fun Day - June 7, 2025!
- ▶ If considering beekeeping but aren't getting bees this summer, come to Fun Day or local meetings to start learning.

How Did We Feel About Our First Year Experience?

- ▶ Feeling of accomplishment - both hives made it over the summer and winter periods!
- ▶ Glad we started with two hives. Gave us an opportunity to compare how the hives were progressing.
- ▶ Glad we each had our own hive to work and developed a system to assist the other.
- ▶ Proud that we remained committed to the time involved (our hives are over one hour away).
- ▶ Things are going to happen (losing queens, etc) but we persevered and didn't give up.

How Did We Feel About Our First Year Experience?

- ▶ Thankful we found a mentor!
 - ▶ She put us at ease with the bees, calmness of approaching the hives and during the inspection.
 - ▶ Allowed us the opportunity to ask questions and confirmed our learning.
 - ▶ Taught us the little things such as how to hold the frames; how to find the queen; usage of the hive tools, especially with propolis sticky frames.
 - ▶ Answered questions we had in-between visits via text or phone call.
 - ▶ Gave us the confidence we needed.
- ▶ Overwhelmed - you have so much to learn and you want to do it right.
- ▶ Relief when winter came. Time to take a breath and make decisions on what areas you want to focus on and learn for next year.

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Remain calm and don't let the large number of bees buzzing around create anxiety. Get into your zone!
- ▶ Importance of working smoothly in the hive, no jerky or harsh movements.
- ▶ Know what you are looking for and the purpose of your hive inspection and be as expedient as possible.
- ▶ Went with basic, standard equipment and didn't focus on just one company. Some of our equipment doesn't match up exactly.
- ▶ Things can happen - be prepared with an Epi-pen, Benadryl, etc. Also, have a game plan on where you can go if you need to get away from the bees.

Thoughts For You/Recommendations

- ▶ Attend the NEKBA Open Apiary Dates or hire a Mentor if you can't attend those dates - reading books, taking classes, and watching videos are all great things you should do. However, the first time you open your hive all that information leaves your head when the bees start buzzing around you. You need practical hands-on experience.
- ▶ Don't be hesitant to ask questions. Do you have the persistence to continually solve problems? Cannot be afraid to make mistakes, just need to learn from them.
- ▶ Importance of bee journal (for at least your first years) - you will refer back to prior years to refresh your memory on when you did this or that, how old is my queen, when did I treat for mites and which treatment did I use, etc.
- ▶ Don't start too large. Would definitely recommend two hives instead of one. Allows you to compare what the hives are doing and to combine/split colonies as needed.

Thoughts For You/Recommendations

- ▶ If you don't have time to take care of your bees, don't start. Honey bees are livestock and they need a beekeeper who has time and who is willing to put forth an effort to keep them.
- ▶ High rate of drop out the first year, 80%. Some say it takes about five years before things start to click.