

Bees are considered an indicator of environmental health. Honey bee populations in the last decade have severely declined, partly due to a phenomenon known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). This phenomenon is due to a hive's inability to sustain itself after a sudden loss in colony worker bee population. While causes, aftermaths, and prevention of CCD are still being studied, some urban dwellers have decided to take matters into their own hands by relocating beehives to urban rooftops and balconies. Cities across the U.S. are beginning to allow urban beekeeping, though there are special considerations to take when setting up hives.

## **City Ordinances**

As beekeeping is a relatively new desire of city dwellers, there are relatively few municipalities that prohibit beekeeping, though most do enforce "nuisance laws" that regulate conditions that people might find objectionable, such as excessive noise or odors. As such, some municipalities put constraints on urban beekeeping activities, such as limiting the number of hives that can be kept and requiring beekeepers to register their hives, as is the case in New York City.

However, there are some municipalities that prohibit beekeeping altogether in New York State, such as Ithaca and Geneva. Several other ordinances make no explicit mention of beekeeping. Before beginning any urban beekeeping project, contact your city hall or a local beekeeping association to clarify any relevant regulations.

### **New York City Ordinances**

It is legal to keep bees in New York City, but beekeepers are required to register their hives with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene within 30 days of hive establishment and renew their registration annually. Registration and renewal forms are available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/ehs/ehs-beekeeping-guideline.pdf>.

### **New York State Law**

Under New York State law, Department of Agriculture and Markets, Article 15, all beekeepers regardless of municipality must report outbreaks of bee disease and pests.

## **Tips for Keeping Bees in Urban Environments**

When keeping bees in cities, certain best practices are recommended to minimize disturbance to neighbors and to prevent "nuisance conditions." The New York City Beekeepers Association (NYCBA) suggests the following:

- Hives should be kept as far away as possible from roads, sidewalks, and rights of way;
- Hives should not be placed directly against a neighboring property unless a solid fence or dense plant barrier of six feet or higher forms the property boundary;
- Hives should be situated so that bees' flight paths do not intersect human rights of way. In some cases, this might require erecting a fence or other barrier to redirect bees' flight;
- Bees should be provided with a consistent source of fresh water to prevent them from seeking water from other sources where bees might be considered a nuisance;
- Swarming should be prevented or minimized, and any hive with unusually defensive behavior or excessive swarming tendencies should be re-queened; and
- Signs should be posted to alert passersby to the presence of hives.

To download the NYCBA's Best Practices for Bee Keeping and for more information about urban

beekeeping, visit <http://www.bees.nyc/nycbas-best-practices-for-beekeeping/>.

## Resources for Urban Beekeepers

### New York State Beekeepers Associations

Beekeepers associations and groups often provide educational resources, including classes, to interested beekeepers, are familiar with beekeeping ordinances, can refer beekeepers to trustworthy supply companies, and offer apiary services such as hive health diagnosis and swarm collecting. Below is a listing of New York State beekeeper's associations specializing in urban beekeeping.

- The Finger Lakes Beekeeping Club ([flbeeclub.com/](http://flbeeclub.com/))
- The New York City Beekeepers Association (<http://www.bees.nyc/>)
- The New York City Beekeeping Meet-Up Group (<http://www.nycbeekeeping.com/>)
- The Long Island Beekeepers Club (<http://www.longislandbeekeepers.org/>)
- Rochester Beekeepers (<http://www.rochesterbeekeepers.com/>)

### Beekeeping Classes and Workshops

In addition to classes offered by the beekeepers associations mentioned above, other organizations and groups offering beekeeping classes and workshops in New York State include:

- **HoneybeeLives** (<http://honeybeelives.org/>) in New Paltz and Brooklyn offers organic beekeeping classes and apiary services throughout Hudson Valley and in New York City. Class schedules and registration information are available online, or you can email [HoneybeeLives@yahoo.com](mailto:HoneybeeLives@yahoo.com) or call **(845) 255-6113**.
- **Urban Roots Community Garden Center** (<http://www.urbanroots.org/>) in Buffalo hosts occasional urban beekeeping classes. Visit their website, email [info@urbanroots.org](mailto:info@urbanroots.org) or call (716) 362-8982 for more information.

### Beekeeping and Urban Beekeeping Books

The NYCBA recommends the following texts as good resources for beginning beekeepers:

- *The Beekeeper's Handbook* by Alphonse Avitabile and Diana Sammataro, Cornell University Press, 2006
- *The Backyard Beekeeper: An Absolute Beginner's Guide to Keeping Bees in Your Yard and Garden* by Kim Flottum, Quarry Books, 2010
- *Beekeeping: A Practical Guide* by Richard E. Bonney, Storey Publishing, LLC, 1993
- Other recommended texts are listed in the NYCBA Best Practices guide

More urban beekeeping books include:

- *Urban Beekeeping: A Guide to Keeping Bees in the City* by Craig Hughes, Good Life Press, 2010
- *Bees in the City: The Urban Beekeepers' Handbook* by Alison Benjamin and Brian McCallum, Guardian Books, 2011

Source: NE Beginning Farmers Project

NYBeeWellness.org, 8/2016