

Keeping bees on allotments. Things you need to consider first.

The real value of honey bees does not come from the honey that they produce but in the pollination service that they provide. Not surprising then that new beekeepers often think that it is a good idea to put a hive of bees on their allotment.

Although there are some experienced beekeepers who successfully keep bees on allotments, it is not recommended practice for beginner beekeepers. This is because a lot can go wrong while you are still learning.

If you are thinking about keeping your bees on an allotment, here are some things you need to consider:

Many councils do not allow livestock to be kept on allotments. Bees are livestock, and are classed as food producing animals. But bees cannot be domesticated, they are still wild animals. They can, and do, sting people; so many councils will not allow bees to be kept on allotment sites for reasons of health and safety.

In spring and early summer a colony of bees will need regular weekly checks in order to prevent swarming. That means opening up the hive and inspecting each brood frame closely and carefully. The best time to open a hive is on a warm afternoon. Just the time when the other plots may be full of activity. Opening the hive means that there will be a lot more bees in the air. They may be defensive and resent the intrusion. As a beekeeper you will have protective clothing, other allotment holders will not be so fortunate.

Other things can annoy bees. They do not like thundery weather. They don't like the smell of beer or BO much either. Bees are sensitive to smell because this is how they find their food, so if other plot holders wear aftershave, hairspray or perfume and smell like flower beds, the bees may be attracted to them and become bothersome. Bees may also annoy people who are sweating.

It would be a sensible precaution to ensure that none of the other plot holders or their families are known to be allergic to bee stings. All the allotment holders would need to know how to respond if someone has a serious allergic reaction to a bee sting (anaphylactic shock, see link): 999 should be dialled without delay. Say it is a bee sting reaction and this will alert the paramedics to have adrenalin ready.

Ideally you shouldn't live far from the allotment so that you can get there quickly to deal with any serious problems that may arise. What if the hive is vandalised and knocked over during the night? It would be chaos on the site in the morning. Would you be available straight away when called to rectify the situation? Who will be on-call when you go on holiday?

Are you adequately insured?

All these things and many more, have to be weighed up very carefully before you make a decision to keep bees on an allotment. If in doubt...don't.