Why does local beekeeping matter?

Bee population

Bee numbers have been declining in recent years due to pesticides, parasites, disease and loss of habitat. Encouraging local beekeeping is a part of a global effort to protect the species.

Pollination

Bees are responsible for the majority of pollination. One third of food crops require pollination, and the presence of honey bees can increase harvest productivity. Local crops such as canola, alfalfa, and sunflower benefit immensely from the use of our honey bees as pollinators. The same applies to the productivity of neighbourhood and community flower, fruit and vegetable gardens.

Biodiversity

Bees are part of a balanced ecosystem. In addition to the benefits that bees provide to the agricultural industry, they also provide similar pollination services to wild plants and flowers. Many of our trees, such as willow and poplar, benefit from the pollination services of bees, which helps to preserve and grow our natural areas. The wealth of flowering plants that blanket the prairies owes much of its existence to the presence of the bees, having evolved in tandem. Plants that bees help to foster provide seeds, fruit, and nuts that feed numerous animal species native to Canada.

Local food production

One bee hive can produce 100 pounds of honey in a year. Locally produced food supports the local business economy and reduces our reliance on transport and shipping. It also satisfies increasing demand for organic foods and foods of known origin. Locally made products like honey are a unique attraction and source of pride for Winnipeg and Manitoba. Hotels can offer visitors and tourists their own branded honey in menu items. It also makes a great souvenir.



Popular interest and education

There is growing interest in hobby beekeeping. Beekeeping provides opportunities to learn about science and nature. It is an activity that families can do together as a way to teach young people environmental stewardship. Many people are continually fascinated observing the activity of a working hive. Others just love the smell and taste of fresh honey.



photo credit: Beeproject Apiaries

Why urban beekeeping?

- Agricultural crops of one plant type offer a singular pollination period over a vast area, whereas urban areas include a much more diverse array of plants and flowers with staggered pollination periods throughout the season. This leads to more nourished bee colonies with a greater chance of survival.
- Due to the *urban heat island effect,* the city offers a longer blooming season and warmer foraging days than rural areas. It also contributes to higher winter survival rates.
- Pollinators like honey bees enhance the beauty of the city through improvements in flower and tree growth.

Quick facts

- Apiaries (honey bee operations) currently exist in rural and agricultural areas within and around the City of Winnipeg.
- Bumblebees, Mason Bees and Leafcutter Bees are native to Manitoba and already live throughout our city.
- Even a significant uptake in downtown beekeeping would not result in a noticeable increase in the number of bees seen in the city centre.
- Bees regularly forage up to 5 km from their hive.
- Honey bees are generally docile and only sting in self-defence or to protect the hive.
- A bee will die after it stings.
- Africanized bees are an invasive species and are more defensive in their behavior. However, they are only found in tropical climates and do not exist in Canada.
- Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Toronto all permit urban beekeeping.
- The Province of Manitoba registers and inspects all beekeeping operations under the *Bee Act of Manitoba.*

Swarms

Swarms are a natural occurrence that can happen when the bee population within a hive grows beyond capacity. A queen bee will lead a portion of the bees away to seek out a new place to build a hive. Bees in a swarm may be discovered resting on a tree or other structure. Bees in a swarm are more docile because they have no hive or eggs to protect. Good management reduces the likelihood of a swarm occurring. Overcrowded hives can be split into two hives. The provincial apiarist should be the first point of contact if a swarm is discovered. (See contact info below.) The provincial apiarist will partner with the local beekeeping community to gather and rehouse the bee colony.



Guidelines for urban beekeeping

The following City guidelines complement provincial regulations and promote good management practices for urban beekeeping.

Best Practice

- Urban beekeeping is discouraged before completing a recognized course in beekeeping and/or seeking membership in a local bee club. See contact list below.
- All beekeepers shall register with the provincial apiarist and shall comply with the Manitoba Bee Act wherever required. See contact info below.
- Every beekeeper shall adhere to good management and husbandry practices and maintain bees in such condition as to prevent swarming, aggressive behavior and disease.
- Indications of disease should be reported to the provincial apiarist.

Planning and design standards

- Maximum number of hives on a site is four plus one nucleus hive.
- Ensure the beehives are located in such a way as to ensure adequate sun exposure and airflow for the health of the bees.
- Installation of a windbreak structure may be required as bees may have trouble foraging if wind inhibits hive access.
- A constant source of water must be provided at all times for your hives starting before the snow melts in the spring, and continuing late into fall.
- Hive openings should be oriented away from nearby public spaces, balconies, terraces or elevated patios.
- Hives on ground level must be within a secure fenced enclosure. Hives should be set back at least 20 feet (6 metres) from the edge of a permeable fence.
- No setback is required if it is a solid fence or includes a vegetative obstruction at least 5 feet (1.5 metres) tall.
- No fencing or setback requirement for hives on rooftops or elevated decks/balconies at least 8 feet (2.4 metres) above grade.
- Rooftop locations should have access via an enclosed staircase or elevator, and have adequate structural integrity to support the additional weight of beehives.
- Appropriate railings around the perimeter of the roof should be considered for the safety of beekeepers.

Application and approval process

- Any new beekeeping operation must be approved by the City of Winnipeg. The application is initiated at the Zoning and Permits office. (See contact list below.)
- Applications must include written authorization from the landowner (per Status of Title).
- Applications should include beekeeper's provincial registration number (if available).
- Applications must include a site plan detailing the proposed set up.
- The enclosure for a beekeeping yard at grade will require Urban Design Review approval.
- The City will prepare a Conditional Use notice to be posted on site.
- Adjacent landowners will have the option to appeal an application.
- See: http://winnipeg.ca/ppd/permits/pdf/AdminVarDtown.pdf.
- Urban beekeeping is only permitted Downtown.



Downtown Area

Contacts and resources

Rhéal Lafrenière - Provincial Apiarist
Phone: (204) 945-4825 Fax: (204)945-4327 Cell (204) 791-0124
e-mail: Rheal.Lafreniere@gov.mb.ca

The Bee Act of Manitoba
http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/b015e.php

Provincial Beekeeper Registration Form
http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/permits-and-licences/pubs/app-beekeeperregistration.pdf

Red River Apiarists' Association
http://www.beekeepingmanitoba.com

Manitoba Beekeepers' Association
http://manitobabee.org

Canadian Urban Beekeeping
http://www.urbanbeenetwork.ca

University of Manitoba - Beekeeping for the Hobbyist
http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/afs/dept/entomology/Beekeeping.html

City of Winnipeg Zoning and Permits
Phone: (204) 986-5140
Unit 31 – 30 Fort Street
http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/find.stm