



Essential Equipment

Advisory Leaflet No: 4

No matter what type of Beekeeper you choose to be (see Advisory Leaflet No 3, Selecting a bee hive), to work safely with your bees and hives, you will need some additional equipment. This falls into two categories, tools and personal protection equipment.

If you look through any of the catalogues from the major equipment suppliers you will find a vast array of items, some of which have immediately obvious purpose!

Apart from the following items, you are strongly advised NOT to buy any additional kit until you find you have a need for it.

ESSENTIAL TOOLS

Hive tools

Bees have a tendency to stick everything together with a sticky red substance called propolis. This means that when you wish to inspect parts of the hive you have to first prise them apart using a hive tool. There are various designs of hive tool on offer, the most popular two being illustrated here.



Both serve rather different purposes and most beekeepers have one of each.

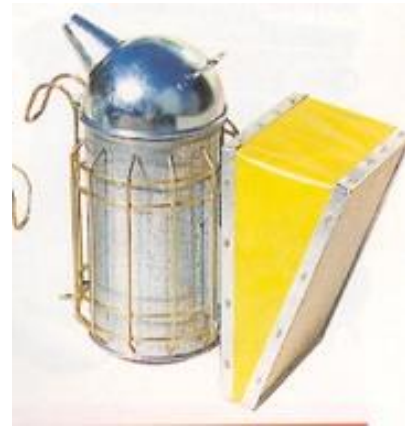
Smoker

As its name suggests, a smoker is a tool for producing smoke!

Although many conventional beekeepers use a *small* puff or two of smoke into the entrance of a hive before opening it up in the belief that this has the effect of quietening the bees, more and more beekeepers are working without smoke.

However, if you are faced with bad tempered or aggressive bees, smoke is very effective at keeping them at bay! For this reason you are recommended to buy a smoker and have it lit and nearby until you gain confidence and get to know your bees.

There are numerous designs of smoker and they can be expensive to buy new. However, a good quality smoker usually outlives its owner. They can get very hot so acquiring one with a guard is worth considering.



Smoker fuel

Whilst equipment suppliers offer a wide range of smoker fuels such as compacted cardboard pellets, tobacco leaf, impregnated sisal etc, smokers will burn almost anything. Whatever you choose to use you should avoid anything that produces a hot smoke.

Lighting a smoker and keeping it alight is not as easy as it sounds and should be practiced. Avoid making life even more difficult by not using cardboard treated with fire retardants!

Feeders

From time to time it might be necessary to feed your bees with a syrup mixture and you are advised to prepare for this by obtaining a feeder for each of your hives. There are a range of different style feeders on the market in varying sizes and you need to ensure that the one you buy will actually fit into your hive.



Two of the most popular are illustrated here.

The larger, square feeder holds around 5 pints of syrup whilst the smaller, round feeder holds just over one pint.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Bee suits



Protection against bee stings is essential. A wide range of protective clothing is available ranging from hats and veils to protect the head, to one-piece bee suits providing complete body cover. White is the traditional cover but olive green has become very popular. However, any colour is acceptable!

Cheaper bee suits tend to be made from fairly thick, heavy duty material. Whilst offering highly effective protection, they can be very uncomfortable to wear on hot days and take a long time to dry when washed.

More expensive suits are made from lighter and sometimes breathable material which, at first sight, may appear to be too thin. However, they offer adequate protection, are more comfortable to wear, and dry quickly when washed. Elasticated cuffs and legs are essential as bees love to travel upwards.

Traditional bee suits incorporated a wide brimmed hat which held the veil clear of the head and offered a much greater range of vision. Recently the "fencing mask" type of head covering has become popular. **You should try both before buying to see which is most comfortable for you.**

Footwear

Any stout footwear will do but Wellingtons are by far the most popular. Easy to slip on, they seal the bottoms of trouser legs and prevent bees moving upwards.

Gloves



Thick leather gauntlets are popular with beginners because they appear to be completely bee proof. They are, however, rather clumsy to use and difficult to clean, an important point in apiary hygiene.



Nitrile gloves, although not sting proof, allow greater dexterity and are increasingly the choice of more experienced and confident beekeepers. Being disposable they contribute to apiary hygiene.