

*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*

-- Matthew 7:24-27

When I teach the obligatory “equipment” class in bee schools, I begin by saying, “We are going to put all of the components together for a bee hive. Where do we start?” Invariably the students will answer, “With a bottom board!” Some beekeepers may underpin their hives with nothing but a bottom board, but my opinion is that installing a sturdy stand is Step One for happy beekeeping.

Stands get little attention. They are a bit like the Middle Child in a large family, unnoticed and unappreciated unless something goes horribly wrong. Let's give stands a bit of respect.

### What are hive stands good for?

When you think about it, stands satisfy a lot of needs. For example:

- They separate the rest of our equipment from the damp, rot-inducing ground.
- They make it more difficult for bugs, mice, ants, worms, etc. to stroll right into the hive.
- They raise the heavy bits up to a comfortable working height, saving our backs.
- They provide a means to level the hive.
- In our area, stands easily raise our hive entrances beyond the reach of most snow drifts and flood waters.
- Some stands provide a nice workbench for our apiary tasks.
- Stands at least 16 or so inches high provide some protection against skunks. Skunks

scratch at the hive entrance to entice bees to come out, then they grab and eat them. With a high stand, the skunk has to stretch to reach the entrance, exposing its tender belly to bee stings.

You would think that a piece of equipment with so much potential value would be standardized. After all, we have standard boxes, standard frames, even standard entrance reducers. Why not standard hive stands? Maybe they are the one last holdout as an expression of our creativity and individualism.

### My search for the perfect stand

I have been on a search for the perfect hive stand. I must admit that my search is a bit half-hearted; procrastination and complacency have combined forces so that I use the same type of stand that I've used since my first day of beekeeping. This year, however, I intend to mix things up a bit, experimenting with variations of common features to find something that I am really happy with.

My ideal stand will be:

1. inexpensive
2. easy to move
3. indestructible/long-lasting
4. stable, even when top-heavy
5. comfortable working height
6. able to easily support more than 400 pounds
7. includes a work surface for placing frames, tool box, etc.
8. skunk deterring

The stand design that I've used for many years has many of these properties (see the first picture on the next page). It is made from two 8-foot 2x4s, so is certainly cheap. It is designed to hold two side-by-side hives, but I only put one per stand. The extra space is great for setting frames, tools, etc. On the down side, the bottoms of the legs rot over time despite being made from pressure-treated lumber. And even though they have proven to be extremely stable in normal circumstances, when pushed to the limit they can fail spectacularly.

Below, I've collected some pictures of stands belonging to an assortment of bee

buddies. Each one gets the job done and each has pros and cons.



My basic yet feature-packed stand is made from two 2x4s. The original design is found in Richard Bonney's [Beekeeping: A Practical Guide](#).



This is a clear case of Colony Collapse Disorder. Even a good stand can fail when a week of constant rain turns "terra firma" into "terra squishy".

Yes, those honey supers were full and no, the bees were not happy!



Classic cinder block stands. The number of blocks can be adjusted to create the optimal working height for each beekeeper.  
(Photo by Todd Walker)





A commercial operation with hives set on pallets. Pallets are cheap, get the hive off of the damp ground and are easy to move... with a forklift. (Photo by Lewis Cauble)



A variation of the basic cinder block stand uses sturdy timbers to span the cinder blocks, allowing more work space or more than one hive per stand.

The cute landing board below the bottom board is intended as a stand-alone hive stand that goes directly on the ground, but that is far too close to the dirt and damp for my comfort. The landing board doesn't serve any genuine purpose but is popular nevertheless. Used as shown, it doesn't hurt anything except the beekeeper's wallet.





A commercially-available stand available from your favorite bee supply house. Note the handy built-in frame perch on the left side.



Beekeeping in the mountains requires lots of ingenuity. This set-up allows all of the hives to be leveled at the same time as well as enabling a quick get-away.  
(Photo by Blair Christian)



4x4s on cinder blocks, all on landscaping cloth.  
(Photo by Blair Christian)



More mountain ingenuity.  
(Photo by Lewis Cauble)

### Which is best?

After all is said and done, it is clear that hive stands are chosen to be fit-for-purpose and not necessarily for style or elegance. Still, though, there should be a one-size-fits-most version that meets the criteria that I listed above. Do you have a hive stand that meets my image of what is ideal? If you do, please send me a picture and description!

### Now for something completely different: True stories (you can't make this stuff up)

1. A customer came into a bee supply store recently and said, "I have a Flow Hive and will get a package of bees soon. Is there anything else I need?" The salesperson said, "Well, for starters, you'll need a hive tool so you can open the hive up and do inspections, treat for parasites and so on." "Oh," said the customer, "I don't need one of those. With a Flow Hive all you do is put the bees in, you never need to open the hive

up. They explain all that on You-Tube."

2. A local community group is interested in hosting a hive at a park. One of the committee members, concerned about stings, asked, "Can you put a fence around the hive and train the bees to stay in it?"

Folks, we have a lot of learning and educating to do! Many county bee clubs have information booths at summer festivals as a public service. Sign up to help! We need Bee Ambassadors! You don't need to know everything (I certainly don't); you just need to be able to point people in the right direction. If your club doesn't do festivals (or even if it does), the Bee Booth at the State Fair always needs volunteers!

*Randall Austin is a NC Master Beekeeper who keeps a few honey bee hives in northern Orange County. He can be reached at [s.randall.austin@gmail.com](mailto:s.randall.austin@gmail.com).*

*Copyright 2016, no reproduction in whole or in part without permission of the author.*