

*"This arm is my arm (and my wife's), it is not yours. Up here I have a right to strike out with it as I please. I go over there with these gentlemen and swing my arm and exercise the natural right which you have granted; I hit one man on the nose, another under the ear, and as I go down the stairs on my head, I cry out: 'Is not this a free country?'"*

*'Yes, sir.'*

*'Have not I a right to swing my arm?'*

*'Yes, but your right to swing your arm leaves off where my right not to have my nose struck begins.'"*

— John B. Finch, Iowa City, 1882

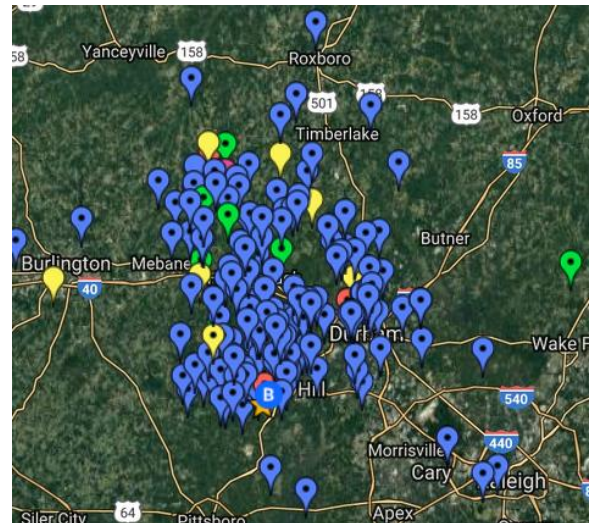
*"Good fences make good neighbours."*

— Robert Frost, "Mending Wall"

I've got one of the world's best neighbors. I've lived in my current house for 26 years. I have seen this particular neighbor twice and I've spoken to him once, in a very short and very civil conversation. What more could I possibly ask for? My Austin grandfather would also have been extremely pleased with this guy. At my grandfather's funeral, he was eulogized as someone who minded his own business and expected others to do the same. If everyone had that perspective, quite a few of the world's problems would go away and politicians would no longer exist.

I've known beekeepers who have a "love me, love my bees" attitude, or even one that insists that beekeeping is a moral imperative so our actions are not to be questioned. Unfortunately this attitude isn't conducive to being a Good Neighbor. Pushed to the extreme, it can turn Normal People (nonbeekeepers) against us and generate ill will at best and restrictive regulations at worst.

What if your neighbor raises mountain lions and lets them roam free at night? He has a fence but the mountain lions jump right over it. You used to have some cats and a cute little dog but you haven't been able to find them in several weeks. Whenever you are trying to enjoy your hot tub in your back yard, the



This Google map of members of the Orange County Beekeepers Association shows that our area has a lot of beekeepers. Are we good neighbors or are we a nuisance? If the latter, backlash in the form of ill will and adverse legislation could affect all of us.

mountain lions dive in the water, splash it all over everyone, and hog all the room. If you yell at them, they snarl at you and threaten to kill you. Would you say, "Isn't that nice? My neighbor is saving an endangered species!" or would you say something else entirely?

The mountain lion example is deliberately extreme and doesn't relate to keeping honey bees... or does it? Remember that honey bees fly. They don't respect fences or property lines. And you may have noticed that they can, and do, sting.

Perception is reality. Do your neighbors feel threatened by your honey bees, even if that fear may be unjustified? Do your bees create a nuisance for surrounding homeowners, particularly during swimming pool season? Have your bees ever stung someone who was mowing their own grass along your adjoining property lines? Even though you and I know that huge swirling masses of bees that are in the process of swarming are completely harmless, do you neighbors know that?

A good beekeeper is a good neighbor. What does that really mean with respect to beekeeping? I don't have all the answers but I do have a few thoughts that may help us all get along and enjoy life.

## Water

Water can be a big issue. A large healthy colony can need as much water every day as a dog, especially in the summer. If you are in a neighborhood, you should definitely know where your bees are getting their water. An extremely important consideration is to ensure that they have a constant, reliable, desirable water source before the bees go out looking for water. Once they've located a source that they like, they'll stick to it and it can be a Herculean effort to switch them off of it.

So how can a brand new beekeeper foresee whether there may be a problem? If there is any doubt whatsoever, be proactive and provide your bees with what they need. See November 2014's "[Got Water?](#)" for an in-depth discussion of this issue.

## Crowding

How many hives can your quarter-acre lot hold? If you stack them up on pallets, the answer could be "quite a few". But please don't over-do it. Consider this: if your neighbor has an old hound dog, good for them! That's nice. But if they have a kennel with hundreds of them, barking, pooping and peeing all the time, getting loose and digging up your petunias, they are a nuisance. Even if they aren't an actual nuisance, they appear to be a nuisance, and that's what counts.

In my experience the difference between one hive and two isn't worth mentioning. Neither are two versus four. But when people start multiplying far beyond that, we aren't talking about a private backyard hobby anymore. It is a bee yard.

What difference does volume make? For one thing, one colony generates a certain amount of alarm pheromone when it is disturbed. A second colony adds to that. A third does as well, and so on. The potential for unexpected harm rises as density rises. If you've ever visited a commercial bee yard, you should know exactly what I'm talking about.

Also, increased density means more consumption of nearby water. If one of your colonies sends foragers to the neighbor's hot

tub, they may think that's cute. But if a 100 colonies are using it as a water source, we have a major issue.

If you really want to own 20 hives and you live in downtown Hillsborough, why not find people in the surrounding area who are willing, maybe even eager, to host some of your hives on their property? Spread them around, a few at each site. Not only will you greatly reduce the chance of being a nuisance, but your bees will have much less competition for nectar and pollen sources as well as water.

If you are a grumpy old hermit like me, you may not know many people offering hive sites. No problem. Ask around at your local bee club and post a request on their e-mail list. Ask your county extension agent. Ask folks at the local garden club. If you do all that, you should have more offers than you can fill. And remember, it is ridiculous to pay or split your honey crop to place hives. The norm is for people to pay you. You don't have to charge but never get suckered into paying. See March 2014's "[Have Bees, Will Travel](#)" for more tips on this general topic.

## Proximity to property lines

The books say that our sweet little European honey bees will defend their hives a distance up to around ten feet. At my house, in hot, dry August that number goes up quite a bit. A lot depends on what kind of disturbance they face: simply walking by is a whole lot different than using a rattle-trap lawn mower.

Are your hives so close to your property line that your neighbors must physically interact with your bees at any time of year? If so, they are way too close. You may have a wonderfully cheerful neighbor who says they don't mind but that doesn't change the fact that you are a bad neighbor.

That said, there are things you can do to mitigate the problem of being too close to others. One excellent idea is to erect a flight barrier placed several feet in front of the hive entrance. A lattice screen, tall shrub, privacy fence or anything else that serves the purpose should work fine. The goal is to force the bees

to rapidly gain height as they fly from the hive. Once they are about ten feet or so high, they won't be in anyone's way as they zoom across the countryside.

Another good idea is to point the hive entrance away from where you don't want the bees to go. They may end up there anyway but they won't stream out in a straight line to get there. I've seen hives on apartment balconies that do this. The entrances face out toward the great open spaces, not the resident's BBQ grill or sliding glass door.

An excellent hive placement tip is to put your bees where neighbors can't see them: out of sight, out of mind. If you have a choice between putting hives in your front yard versus tucked away behind a privacy fence in the back yard, choose the latter! It is usually easier to avoid conflict altogether rather than having to resolve it after it arises.

## Pests

My niece lives in a "fixer upper" neighborhood in Louisiana. An abandoned house not far from her was recently demolished. Guess what? All the rats that lived there have rushed to find new homes in the surrounding area. So now my niece, who is an exemplary housekeeper herself, must deal with rats. What a nightmare!

The same thing happens with Varroa mites in honey bee hives. One person's ineffective management can, and does, spill over to their beekeeper neighbors. When colonies collapse from Varroa mites and their viruses, they are called "mite bombs" because of the ensuing rapid spread of the colony's mites into surrounding hives via drifting and robbing.

If you want to be a good neighbor, be a good neighbor to your fellow beekeepers too. Control your mite populations! There are many ways to do that, but the only way to know if your method is working is to monitor using the sugar shake or alcohol wash tests. Mite control without monitoring isn't control at all, it is wishful thinking. This is especially important for idealistic beekeepers who rely on resistant stock, hive manipulations or good intentions as

their only mite management techniques. If those are genuinely working, then great, but if they aren't then those beekeepers are part of the problem, not the solution. Only by monitoring with reliable methods can we know whether we are "beeKEEPERS" or "beeKILLERS". See March 2016's "[I Don't See Any Mites](#)" for more information.

Maybe you are the responsible beekeeping neighbor and it is the other guy who doesn't "get it." This is your chance to be the Good Neighbor by kindly offering to take a look at your neighbor's bees. Do a mite check for her/him. Offer to apply legal, effective treatments when needed (for free labor – you cannot charge for this unless you are a licensed exterminator). You'll not only be supporting local beekeeper camaraderie but will be protecting your own bees in the process.

## Mosquito spraying

Ever since the Zika scare a couple of years ago, Joe Homeowner has gone nuts over spraying his yard for mosquitoes. Roadside signs have popped up everywhere advertising mosquito-spraying services. The problem is that mosquito sprays kill flying insects, including honey bees.

We must never forget that Joe Homeowner has every right to be concerned about mosquito-borne illnesses (even when those concerns are blown out of proportion) and every right to enjoy his/her backyard without being plagued by biting insects. Most of us are too young to remember when yellow fever and malaria were common in North Carolina (DDT took care of that years ago), but a glance around the globe is all we need to understand that mosquitoes, as a species, are a threat to humans. In the US, we are reminded of this every now and then by things like West Nile Virus and Zika.

Is the conflict between mosquito control and beekeeping irreconcilable? No, it just requires collaboration. It is very possible to kill mosquitoes without killing honey bees, even when using commercial mosquito-spray pesticides. These sprays are applied as a mist

which kills any insects they come in contact with. The mist doesn't hang in the air for very long. And the most common of these sprays have a short half-life (for pyrethroids it is about 12 hours). If they are applied in the evening when mosquitoes are most active and honey bees are not, they can do their job with minimal harm. For even more protection, hive entrances can be screened to prevent flight during spraying (do this the night beforehand) or hives can be moved temporarily to another site.

These solutions imply that there is collaborative communication between the beekeeper, homeowner and pesticide applicator. Nurture that by respectfully requesting information about what will be applied and when. Carefully read the pesticide label, especially the bee-related instructions that are now, by law, included on newer labels when the product poses risks for honey bees. Don't start off with a tirade about "why can't we all get along (with mosquitoes)" or why all pesticides are tools of Satan. It is friends who are helpful, not enemies, so don't turn potential friends into enemies. Begin from their perspective and work from there toward your objective, not the other way around. That's how collaboration succeeds.

Unless you are a miserable old grouch, I doubt your neighbors want to see you unhappy. They just don't want to be unhappy themselves. Work toward making everybody happy. See July 2016's "[Save the Bees, Starting With Your Own](#)" for more helpful information.

### Spread the love

When I got my first honey harvest, I gave a bottle to my neighbors in a blatant attempt to persuade them to think favorably upon my hobby. You can do this even if you don't have a honey harvest! Just go to the local bee store, buy a jar of local wildflower honey, take the

label off and give it to your neighbor. They don't need to know that it didn't come from your bees. They probably don't have a very good idea of how honey is actually made in the first place, and they certainly don't know when our local honey flows are. Let's just let them enjoy the honey and feel a debt of gratitude to their next-door beekeeper.

If your neighbors take an interest in your bees, invite them over to see inside the hives. Make sure they are extremely well protected – full suit, veil and gloves are ideal – and don't do this during a dearth when the bees are cranky. And if little Johnny from next door is in kindergarten, offer to come to his school to tell his class about honey bees.

If you do all these things and your neighbors still complain, then you have lousy neighbors and you should consider moving!

### Do unto others

Being a good neighbor obviously covers a lot more ground than just beekeeping activities. Matthew 7:12 tells us, "So in **everything**, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." We can be good neighbors by recognizing that our beekeeping has the potential to affect others in what they consider to be adverse ways. Then we do what we can to keep them from having the perception that they are being annoyed, inconvenienced or harmed by our hobby. That's a big challenge but we beekeepers are used to big challenges!

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