

*"We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us."*

— Marshall McLuhan

*"My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food and a little whiskey."*

— William Faulkner



Even the most basic cell phone can be a valuable tool in the bee yard. It can be used for much more than smashing Small Hive Beetles or playing Angry Birds.

Beekeepers have a history of repurposing things. Legend has it that Langstroth's hive bodies were recycled champagne crates. The classic hive tool is a carpenter's nail puller (you can purchase one in Wal-Mart's hardware section). Swiffer pads are used as hive beetle traps. But how many of us take full advantage of an expensive tool that probably 99 to 100% of us carry into the bee yard, but few use for beekeeping?

That tool is the cell phone. In beekeeping, it can be used for far more than squishing Small Hive Beetles! I asked my local beekeeping friends what they use cell phones for and was overwhelmed with a wide variety of responses. Many of the ideas were suggested by lots of different people, suggesting that maybe cell phones are being widely used by everyone but me! In fact, Rachel Royce even made a suggestion for how to remove propolis stains from a phone (she uses acetone).

Take a look at these ways for using your cell phone in the bee yard and give them a try!

1. **Call 911.** Need I say more?
2. **Take photos.** Mark Powers said, "I took a photo with an iPhone 5, and it won the blue ribbon at the annual NCSBA meeting and became a cover of *Bee Buzz* [Summer 2018], so having a camera with you on your phone is more than half the battle to capturing a special moment."
3. **Take photos, part two.** Nancy Oglesby said, "I take photos of odd things I see in the hive so I can post them to the chapter's Google listserv and ask for advice."
4. **Zoom in.** Allen Hunter said, "I think the cleverest use is as a lightweight microscope.

Can't see eggs but suspect they are there? Snap a pic and zoom in.... \*Pop\* There're them grains o' rice."

5. **Dictate notes.** David Eckert said, "I use my cell phone to dictate my inspection notes, mite test results, tasks for my next visit, etc. into a note taking application ([Keep Notes](#)). My hands often have propolis on them during inspections and that has made writing messy and difficult in the past. Using voice to text translation helps me to capture notes immediately after inspecting a colony and before I mix up the colonies in my mind."
6. **Taking notes the old-fashioned way.** Nancy Oglesby said, "I have a bee buddy who uses her phone as her bee journal. She types in the results of her inspection as she goes and later uploads it to her computer."
7. **Taking notes the techno-geek way.** Jim Greco said, "I use [BeeTight.com](#) to log all of my inspections – this allows me to bring all of my logs with me every time I'm in the apiary." The app's PR team says, "[Beetight](#) is a free web application for beekeepers and is the best way to manage your hives and track them online or on your phone. You'll wonder how you ever survived with the old notebooks and spreadsheets!"
8. **Using the timer** for sugar-shake Varroa mite assessments and for timing Oxalic Acid vaporizer applications.
9. **Leveling hives.** Mark Smith said, "A function of my cell phone is the integrated level.

When visiting other apiaries, it's quick and easy to ensure their hives are leaning forward or at least level. No need for a pocket level when you have one already on your cell phone!"

10. **Shine a spotlight.** Jeff Telander said, "I've used my phone's flashlight to illuminate cells when looking for eggs in poor light."
11. **Plan ahead.** Chris Cramer said, "The weather app is good for knowing if I want pants or shorts under the bee suit."
12. **Phone a friend.** Jane Simpson said, "I have used mine to call my partner when he's in the house to bring me something or to re-light my smoker!" and Celeste Mayer said, "I keep mine handy to call in a quick phone consult with a bee buddy."
13. **Hive placement.** Janet Staats recommends using a sun-path app such as Sun Tracker AR or Sun Surveyor to find sunny spots and a compass app (such as [Compass](#)) to face hives in the optimum direction.
14. **Identifying critters and plants.** There are lots of free apps (such as [Seek](#)) that let you take a picture of something and it then identifies it for you.
15. **Identifying honey bee pests and maladies.** The government (Canada's, not ours) has developed a free app, [Bee Health](#), that serves as an in-apiary reference guide. The description says, "The Bee Health app is based on current scientific knowledge to address honey bee diseases and pests. It is a handy resource to help beekeepers and other users to detect, diagnose, manage and treat honey bee diseases and pests. It includes pictures and treatment options which will aid beekeepers in adopting appropriate pest management practices. Thus, beekeepers can improve bee health and enhance on-farm food safety and biosecurity practices in their operations." Aside from all that, it is a valuable resource developed by a highly respected apiculturist, Medhat Nasr.
16. **Telling the time.** It is said we can identify a truly engaging hobby, one that helps heal the soul, when it causes us to be completely

unaware of the passage of time. That's great for reducing stress but it can cause us to miss dinner. The phone's clock helps.

17. **An excuse to escape.** Someone once asked me to help them install a couple of packages. I said, "Sure, we can be done in about 15 minutes. I'll be there at 7 pm. Make sure everything is set up when I get there." When I arrived, nothing was set up – the person hadn't even picked out a site to place the hives. Fifteen minutes came and went. After about an hour and a half, when the new beekeeper went into the house to mix up some sugar syrup (that hadn't been done either), I set the alarm on my phone for 10 minutes, with a phone ringtone as the notification. When the timer expired and the alarm sounded, I "answered the phone" and said something like, "Hey! Yes, I'm still here. Sorry. I'll be there, I promise. Please tell them not to get mad. I'm leaving right now. Sorry." I gave my apologies and left.

Once you figure out what to use a cell phone for in the bee yard, a few tips for doing so include:

1. Don't set the phone to vibrate, put it in your pocket and then forget that it is there.
2. Gloves with special tips on the end of the index finger make texting and swiping easier.
3. Veils with a pull-down front allow you to answer a call without removing your veil.

Lastly, don't make the mistake of getting so absorbed with texting or checking Facebook that you forget why you came to the bee yard! Honey bees are a lot more interesting than [Angry Birds](#) or any You-Tube video.

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