

Buying Hives and Bees

Tips for Success

It is most common for beekeepers in Fiji to acquire their first beehives by buying hives that are already assembled and contain bees. There are two ways to buy these hives:

1. Buy new fully assembled hives that contain a small 'nucleus bee colony' consisting of a young mated queen and 3-5 frames of brood, pollen, honey and bees.
2. Buy used hives that have a fully established bee colony.



Both ways to acquire bees can be a good way to start, but there are risks that need to be considered:

- The health and condition of the bees
- The quality and condition of the hive equipment

It is best to examine the hives before buying. If the buyer does not know how to examine the quality of a hive, it is best to ask a skilled beekeeper to help, much as a mechanic can help when buying a car.

Later, when adding more hives, most beekeepers choose to save money by assembling hive parts themselves and creating new bee colonies by 'splitting' their own hives.

Inspection for Bee Diseases

Acquiring a diseased hive can lead to death of the colony and spread disease to nearby colonies. It is a legal requirement in Fiji for bees to be inspected by Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) prior to them being moved. This regulation applies to new and used hives, bees sold as nucleus colonies, and caged queens.

The supplier is required to obtain BAF permission to move the bees, which also indicates that BAF found no serious disease in the hive. However, it is your job to check the quality of the bee hive, for the presence of a laying queen, her quality and the overall condition of the colony.

Prepare for Arrival of the Hives

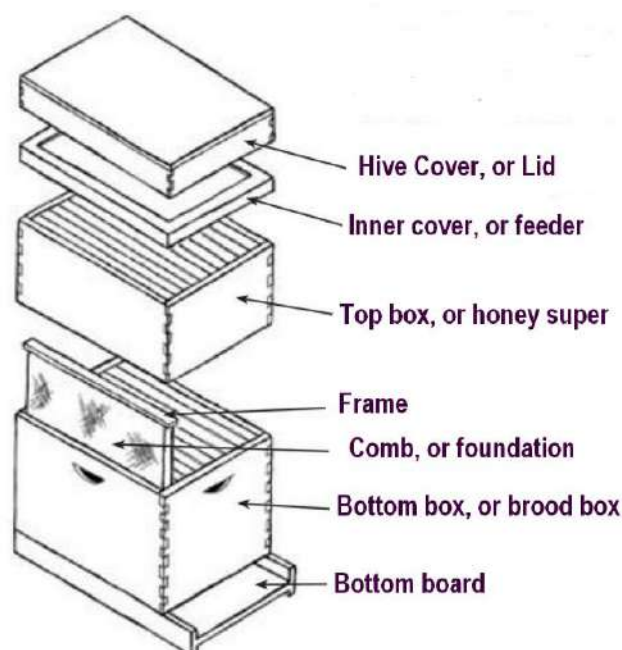
Before the hives arrive, select an apiary site away from people and livestock, away from areas which may be prone to flood or that are difficult to access. The bees prefer wind-protected places in partial shade or full sun.

Set up hive stands that raise the hive entrances up to near knee height, to reduce predation by cane toads and to make working in the hive more comfortable. Hive stands are usually sold separately, or can be easily made from concrete blocks and 6"x2" timbers.

Buying New Hives

There are several reputable beekeepers in Fiji who sell bees and hives as part of their beekeeping business. Personal recommendations can be helpful to find a reputable supplier.

A typical beehive consists of two boxes containing frames with wax foundation, a cover, inner cover, and bottom board. Often, the second box is supplied separately, and added to the hive after the colony has grown.



Avoid buying hives and frames that do not conform to standardized dimensions, or that are constructed from inferior materials such as Masonite for covers and metal bottom boards.

The bee colony in a new hive typically consists of only 3-5 frames of brood and bees. To encourage the colony to grow, it is a good practice to feed the bees sugar syrup (3 cups sugar to 2 cups water) until the bees have built comb in 8 or 9 of the frames.

Buying Used Hives

Used hives with mature bee colonies are often sold “as-is”, in some cases with the buyer accepting responsibility for obtaining biosecurity permission and moving the hive. Buyer and seller should agree to terms of the sale before buying, and it is especially important to assess the condition of the hive and bee colony before buying.



Second hand double story bee hives

Buying Bees



Installing a nuc colony into a regular hive

Bees are typically sold two ways in Fiji: As a nucleus colony or a caged queen. A nucleus colony is a small colony that has all ages of bees and brood on 3-5 frames, and a young laying queen. It is most common for the price of the nucleus colony to include the frames of comb, but not the box.

A caged queen is a young laying queen with a few young attendant worker bees. To start a new colony with a caged queen, she must be introduced into a colony of queen less worker bees. A bee colony

Buying Beehives: New or Used?		
	Buying New Hives	Buying Used Hives
Likely Advantages	Longer equipment life Reputable experienced supplier Likely younger queen that lays more eggs	Convenience Likely a larger colony population and shorter time to harvesting honey Lower price
Possible Disadvantages	Likely smaller population of bees and longer time before harvesting Higher price	Shorter equipment life Poorly constructed hive Unknown supplier reputation Older queen that lays fewer eggs Higher risk of disease

Empty Used Hives and Beekeeping Tools

Buying empty used hive boxes and frames where a bee colony has died can be risky, as the frames and boxes could be infected with American Foulbrood Disease, which has no cure. If BAF or experienced beekeepers confirm the presence of foulbrood disease in the area during the past few years, it could be risky to purchase nearby empty used boxes and frames.



American Foulbrood Disease (AFB)

Used bee smokers, hive tools, bee suits and honey extracting equipment are generally unlikely to pose a disease risk if cleaned properly. Remove any beeswax and propolis, and examine the quality.

Post-sale Warranty

Buyers and sellers should agree upfront about any post-sale warranty period. Most suppliers of new hives provide a 30-day warranty period that the bees will be queen-right and healthy, and materials are free of serious defects. This is sufficient time for the buyer to inspect the hives. Keep the seller's contact details and a sale receipt proving payment.

Approximately two weeks after delivery of the hives, buyers should inspect the brood nest of their new hives. The presence of worker larvae or eggs proves that the hive contained a laying queen after the delivery. The absence of all ages of larvae and eggs suggests there is no laying queen in the colony.



Bee eggs confirms the presence of a queen bee in the past 3 days

After the warranty period, it is not appropriate to expect the supplier to remedy problems that arise with the hives. Hives purchases do not normally include long-term technical support or beekeeping training. Basic beekeeping skills are best acquired before buying bees.

Learn More

It is best to learn about beekeeping prior to acquiring hives. Training classes, nearby beekeepers and the internet are all good sources of learning. The internet has good websites and YouTube videos addressing some topics related to starting with bees that are not addressed in this paper, including:

- How to move beehives
- How to inspect bee colonies
- How to feed new bee colonies to make them strong



Authors: John Caldeira, Fiji Beekeepers Association, and Dr. Cooper Schouten, Southern Cross University, Bees for Sustainable Livelihoods, and Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, August 2021.

