

## MY FIRST YEAR AS A BEEKEEPER

The year was 2005 in Hillsborough, New Jersey. The previous fall I had planted a small orchard - maybe 16 or so fruit trees in the field next to our house - augmenting the 4 or 5 trees that were now 4 years old in another part of the yard. Curious how the older trees never produced much of anything.

Spring 2006 came, many of the trees bloomed and my family and I looked forward to some home grown fruit. The alternating warm and cold days of spring came and went, the flower petals fell off - and - hardly any fruit was to be seen. I wondered why... until it occurred to me that we hadn't seen many bees. And that meant that we probably had very little pollination.

A little research and I slowly became aware of the plight of honey bees in the U.S. The occurrence of CCD (Colony Collapse Disorder), tracheal and Varroa mites, and numerous other diseases that have befallen honey bees since the mid-1980's have destroyed more than 80% of the feral colonies in the US. In some places, a wild honey bee is a rare sight indeed. And no honey bees means very reduced pollination of crops.

What to do? "Get our own bees" I said in a bit of machismo! A little more research and in early 2007 I located a few beekeepers in and outside New Jersey. But I was too late... no bees were available for purchase by the time I got around to seriously ordering some. Not that I knew what to do with them when they showed up. Borders did have a few beekeeping books. A favorite, because of the title, was "Beekeeping for Dummies". Perfect for me I thought!

A little more effort and I discovered that the New Jersey's Department of Agriculture has a state apiarist - Tim Schuler. Tim was very welcoming and he told me about a "Beekeeping for Beginner's" 3-day course offered by Rutgers University in April, 2008. Tim and Bob Hughes (another well known & experienced NJ beekeeper) ran the course and were key in making me "almost obsessed" as some would say, with beekeeping.

At Schuler's suggestion I started with 2 hives in 2008 so that I could monitor and learn from the difference between them (great idea!). I collected some 30 lbs of honey most of which I gave away. Apparently that's a good return for the first year. And, "tastes really good" my family and neighbors tell me. I have hopes and plans for more hives in 2009 located on properties volunteered by farmers and homeowners alike in Hillsborough, Skillman, Ringoes, Pennington, Hopewell Valley and Lambertville. And I've just launched my honey web site: [www.BambooHollow.com](http://www.BambooHollow.com).

I must add, besides Schuler and Hughes, there are a number of NJ Beekeepers Association people who were key in giving me the right attitude towards this "hobby". They helped me in times of need, in times of pure lack of experience, and in times of mild success. Some I just heard speak at meetings and seminars, some came to my house to help, and some welcomed me at their place to watch and learn. Among them are: Joe Lelinho (who brought equipment at night to my driveway to extract honey by moonlight, while my wife Patti ran back and forth keeping the motion detector light on), Liz Nelson who introduced me to Joe and with whom I shared trials and tribulations of swarms, mites, etc., Stan Wasitowski who supplied me with bees, equipment and who let me talk his ears off, Landi Simone who blows me away with her knowledge and products, Grant Stiles who always brings reality and experience to the table and to Bob "Beekeeper" Simonofsky (he wont remember this) who I randomly called in the beginning and he pointed me to some of the very people who later helped me out. Forgive me if I didn't list everyone - all in all, it's easy to see why bee people are great people!

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