

You Can Do It!

Becoming a beekeeper requires crossing boundaries in knowledge, emotions, attitude and skills just to set up a hive, survive the winter and get your first harvest. You aren't quite the same person as you were before; now you are a BEEKEEPER. Other people can't truly relate to this new aspect of your life unless they've been there too. That explains why support groups (local bee clubs) are so popular.

Now what? Is there more to this new life than keeping your bees alive and getting a little honey? Just as the Boy Scouts have merit badges that encourage a wide variety of experiences within their realm, beekeepers can explore many different aspects of our craft. Even if you have no intention of becoming an expert in a particular area, I've found that dabbling in a variety of bee-related activities gives valuable perspective and experience that carries over to all of your bee pursuits.

A few things that a hobbyist can easily do include:

1. Move hives for pollination. I have done this for a small pick-your-own strawberry farm and a friend's backyard orchard. It is much easier than it sounds. Keep in mind that this is a valuable service so even if you are doing it for a friend, make sure you are properly compensated. The going rate for pollination in this area is at least \$50 per hive per crop, often with a minimum charge. Don't be conned into splitting your honey harvest for the "privilege" of pollinating someone's garden. You may agree to pollinate for a share of your friend's fruit and vegetable crop, but leave your honey harvest out of the equation.
2. Raise queens and make nucs. You can do this to meet your own needs or to sell. If you intend to sell bees to others, make sure you comply with North Carolina's inspection requirements. Compliance isn't difficult. Google "sell bees in NC" (include the quotes) for instructions and exemptions.
3. Make creamed honey. Also called "creamed" or "spun" honey, creamed honey is specially-processed,

finely-granulated honey that has the consistency of peanut butter. It is great for spreading on biscuits. Most Southerners have never heard of creamed honey --- it's just not something we are raised on --- so it can be a hard sell. But it is very popular among people who know what it is. It is often blended with flavorings such as chocolate, cinnamon, strawberry, etc.

4. Make beeswax-based lip balm, hand cream, furniture polish, etc. These are great projects if you like to experiment. Most of these products don't actually contain much beeswax so you can have fun even if you don't have a lot of wax. Also try making ornamental figures or candles. Simple beeswax bars have lots of household uses and are a popular item too.
5. Go on the road with a bee show. Schools, civic groups and community service organizations often request presentations on honey bees and beekeeping. You don't have to be a professor to share your knowledge. Compared to ordinary people, if you know the difference between a worker, drone and queen, you are a bee expert! The story of how you got interested in beekeeping and your exploits as you got started is a topic that can entertain and inspire the public.

These are just a handful of possibilities gleaned from things I've done. Expand this list based on your own interests and opportunities. Try something new, learn and have fun!

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