

A STEADING CODEX FIELD GUIDE

Your First Year with a Hive

Bees, box, and a full year — spring build-up to winter's quiet.

A first year of beekeeping is mostly learning to read a colony and then getting out of its way. Here's the year in order — decide, install, build up, take the flow, prepare for winter — with the inspection log that turns a hive check into a record.

SC The Steading Codex

Decide, then set up

Space, local rules, and a good spot — settled before the bees arrive.

Check three things first: that you have room and a clear flight path away from where people walk; that your local rules allow a hive; and that no one in the house has a serious bee-sting allergy. Then order early — bees sell out in winter for spring delivery, as a **package** (loose bees + a queen) or a **nuc** (a small working colony on frames).

Site the hive

- Morning sun, afternoon shade in hot climates; full sun in cool ones
- A windbreak at the back; entrance facing away from foot traffic
- Water within sight — bees need it, and a birdbath beats the neighbour's pool
- Level, off the ground, with room for you to stand and work behind it

Getting them home

Install gently, feed them, then leave them alone.

A nuc is the easy start: lift its frames into your box in the same order, close up, done. A package takes a little more nerve — spray the bees lightly with sugar water, release the queen in her cage over a few days so they accept her, and shake the rest in.

A new colony has no stores, so **feed 1:1 sugar syrup** until they're drawing comb and foraging well. Then the hardest instruction in beekeeping: leave them be for a week. Bees resent a landlord who opens the roof every day.

Smoke calm, move slow, wear your veil. Confidence comes from the second inspection; the first one everybody's heart pounds.

Reading a healthy colony

The five things you check, every inspection.

Once a week in spring, on a warm, still, sunny day, open up and read five things in order: **queen** (eggs standing in cells mean she laid within three days — you rarely need to spot her herself); **brood** (a solid pattern, not scattered); **stores** (honey and pollen for the week ahead); **space** (room to lay and store, or are they crowded); and **health** (temperament, and any pests).

As the colony fills a box, add the next one so they always have room. A crowded, honey-bound hive in spring is a hive making swarm plans — if you see queen cells hanging along the bottom of the frames, get advice quickly.

Supering and the honey

Give them room to store, keep them cool and watered, watch the mites.

When the nectar flows, the colony pours it in fast. Add **honey supers** above the brood so they have somewhere to put it — running out of room mid-flow, again, invites swarming. You take only the surplus; the brood boxes are theirs.

In heat, make sure they have shade and water so they're not spending the whole workforce cooling the hive. And through the season, get in the habit of **monitoring for varroa mites** — the single biggest threat to a colony. Learn to test the mite load and follow your local, tested treatment guidance; this guide flags the job, it doesn't prescribe a dose.

The most important weeks

A colony survives winter on what you set up in autumn.

After you pull any harvest, the whole job becomes winter prep. Make sure they have **enough stores** for your climate — a lot of honey by weight — and feed a thicker 2:1 syrup if they're light. Do your final mite check and treatment while there's still brood-free time for it to work.

Reduce the entrance so a small winter cluster can defend it against robbers and mice, and make sure the hive has an upper vent — winter kills more colonies through damp than through cold.

Quiet months

Hands off, but not eyes off.

Through winter you mostly stay out. The colony clusters and shivers to keep the queen warm, working through its stores. Give it a windbreak, keep the entrance clear of snow and dead bees, and **heft the back of the hive** now and then — a heavy hive has stores, a suddenly light one may need emergency feeding on a mild day.

Don't open it in the cold to 'check' — you'll chill the cluster. On the first warm afternoon you'll see cleansing flights, and the year begins again.

Inspection log

Every check, in five reads — with the date and what you did.

DATE	HIVE	QUEEN / EGGS	BROOD + STORES	TEMPER / PESTS	ACTION TAKEN

YOU'VE GOT THE GUIDE

Now keep the record. The full ledger is *Hive Heartbeat*.

The log at the back is one sheet from Hive Heartbeat — a 100+ page working field journal for the whole season, not just this guide: structured logs, reference decks, and season reviews. If this helped, that's where the rest of it lives.

See the full journal → thesteadingcodex.com/volumes/hive-heartbeat
Or the whole system → thesteadingcodex.com/collection