Beginning Sustainable Beekeeping Classes

Have you ever wanted to learn beekeeping? Do you want to make some extra money selling products of the hive or by pollinating crops? Here is your opportunity. Through a combination of presentations, classroom time and “hands on experience”, students will work closely with his/her instructor to learn what to expect and how to manage the first year of keeping honeybees. This course applies sustainable beekeeping practices and exposes students to a broad spectrum of beekeeping information and experience including the biology of the honeybee, their connection to the pollinators who shared their habitats, honeybee health, pests and diseases, seasonal client management, tools of the trade and products of the hive. The goal of the course is to prepare students to become successful beekeepers for years to come.

Students are not required to keep bees to take this class. Many students choose to wait a year before starting their own apiary. Those who keep bees during the class year will raise at least one colony in the community bee yard and move the colony to permanent locations by late summer/early fall.

Beginning beekeepers are often taught to keep a **minimum of two honeybee** colonies in a single location when starting his/her beekeeping journey. While a person can succeed with just one colony, having more than one colony of honeybees allows the beekeeper to compare colony strength and resources, transfer resources between colonies and provides a baseline for colony growth.

The combination of readings, class discussions and hands-on learning is designed to have a direct impact on the participants success in beekeeping and managing colony health. While attendance is not mandatory, a class absence can be detrimental to meeting the course goals.

Note: this class will be limited to 15 students maximum so all participants can obtain proper instruction and mentoring.

The dates that the class will meet and the subjects that will be covered during each meeting is as follows:

February 7, 2026: introduction, sharing the joys of beekeeping

February 21, 2026: understanding honeybees: what do bees need? What do beekeepers need?

March 7, 2026: what happened in the winter apiary? The year in the life of a honeybee

March 21, 2026: swarms, nucleus hives, splitting hives. Preparing for the arrival of your bees. Making/assembling beekeeping equipment.

April 11, 2026: checking up on your expanding honeybee colony; inspecting the colony

Note: the date that I will be able to drive down to Flint and pick up the package be use is beyond my control and depends upon the weather in Northern California and the Michigan vendor that arranges for the transportation from California to Michigan. I assume that it will be within the first two or three weeks of April so we may have to adjust some class sessions in the apiary because of this uncertainty.

May 2, 2026: Bee biology, learning how to take and test samples.

May 9, 2026: pests and pathogens. Treatment and feeding. Winter begins in August.

The dates that the beginning class will meet after May 9, 2026 are all tentative and actual meeting dates for June, July, August and September will be provided to you on May 9, 2026.

June ??, 2026: preparing for winter: feeding, treating, wrapping and making a plan for fall mite control. Making money with honeybees.

July ??, 2026: evaluating your colonies for winter survival

August ??, 2026 & September ??, 2026: final winterization, emergency winter feeding and monitoring your hive over the winter.

Location: all initial classes will meet at the Betsie Valley Library in Thompsonville and will begin promptly at 1 PM. Each session will last for approximately one to two hours.

The community apiary will be located at 5349 S. Thompsonville Hwy., Thompsonville 49683. Any and all live honeybee demonstrations will be held at this location.

Costs: unfortunately, beekeeping is not cheap and I will do everything I can to reduce expenses as much as possible. Each student will pay $75.00 as tuition for the course that will be donated to the library. This amount also covers one season of mentorship by the instructor, either on-site or virtually. **If anyone has difficulty paying the tuition amount or for the equipment, please see me and I will be happy to make alternative arrangements.**

Equipment/Clothing/Tools

A beginning beekeeper will need the following items: telescoping lid. $150-$250.

Beekeeping jacket with veil ($50-$150)

Beekeeping gloves: goat skin ($20)

Hive tool: $10

Smoker: $30-$60

*Complete hive setu*p, i.e. bottom board, brood chamber, 2 honey supers, 24 wooden frames with wax foundation, inner cover and outer cover: $250-$300 if 8 frame mediums for all boxes.

Note: if you have any carpentry skills and have the appropriate tools, the cost of a complete hive set up will be the expense of the lumber itself and the time that you spend making the equipment. The exterior of all wooden equipment should be painted or chemically treated to reduce deterioration but DO NOT PAINT THE INSIDE OF YOUR BOXES!!!

Hive stand: four concrete cinderblocks ($20) or make your own hive stand using scrap lumber.

Honeybees; 3 lb. package of bees with mated queen. $180-$210

5 frame nucleus colony with laying queen: $190-$300

Note: I will arrange for the purchase/arrival of the package to honeybees once all of the student's preferences are known and fees are paid. You may also obtain your own honeybees but I am willing to obtain either packages or nucleus hives for students once the appropriate costs are paid.

Varroa mites were first brought to this country in 1987 and have spread throughout the world. These mites not only attach themselves to young pupae, puncture their exoskeleton but also transfer a host of deadly viruses to your honeybees that can easily kill your colony. Fortunately, there are a number of treatments that are used throughout the industry to control these pests and I may be able to supply some of you with treatments for minimal cost.

Textbook: Caron, DM, Connor, LJ,; **Honey Bee Biology 3rd** ed; Wicwas Press (2022). This textbook by him is the latest and most complete book on beekeeping. It approaches beekeeping from a scientific and practical viewpoint and will remain one of your prized reference texts for years. **If we can order minimum of 16 books, we will be eligible for a significant discount, i.e.<$60 each.**

There are a number of other good beekeeping books, one of which is "Beekeeping for Dummies" Latest edition, Amazon $18. I will place a number of my personal beekeeping books on reserve at the library for your in-library use. Please feel free to go to the Thompsonville library and look through the books that I placed on reserve and perhaps you may wish to purchase one for your own personal use.

Instructor's Bio. Rick Dimanin has been keeping bees more than 15 years and completed the Master Beekeeping program at Cornell University in New York. He serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Michigan Beekeepers Association, and is a Michigan delegate to the American Beekeeping Federation.

Rick and his wife Lisa moved to Thompsonville in July, 2024 and have become involved in the Benzie Bee Guild and the Grand Traverse beekeeping club. He and Lisa own 40

acres north of Thompsonville on the Betsy River where Rick keeps approximately 30 to 50 colonies in his primary apiary on the property and multiple other colonies in different locations in Benzie County and in downstate Michigan.

As to teaching experience, Rick was a full adjunct professor in the paralegal program at Madonna University in Livonia, Michigan for 22 years and won multiple teaching awards during his tenure. He is in the process of retiring from his profession as a medical malpractice trial attorney and will be devoting his full-time efforts to beekeeping.

Warning: even the most careful beekeepers get stung. If you are truly allergic to honeybee venom and have suffered an anaphylactic reaction (about 1% of the population), you probably should not be beekeeping until you undergo desensitization by a credentialed physician.

Everyone who is stung has some reaction to honeybee venom. Fortunately, 99% of those reactions are localized to the specific area of where the sting occurred. Symptoms of these reactions are pain, swelling, itchiness etc.

However, approximately 1% of the population develop true anaphylactic reactions to honeybee venom. A person truly allergic to honeybee venom can have body wide reactions such as swelling of the airway, lightheadedness, profuse sweating, and even death.

I would strongly suggest that every beekeeper have an Epi-Pen or some other emergency anti-anaphylactic device and have it readily available when beekeeping.