

# Make your own Honey Cow (Top Bar Bee Hive)

by [velacreations](#) on April 2, 2011

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## Intro: Make your own Honey Cow (Top Bar Bee Hive)

More information: <http://velacreations.com/bees.html>

More photos: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/velacreations/sets/72157622528453587/>

Beekeeping is an ancient DIY art, performed by amateurs and makers for centuries. Anyone can produce natural honey at home. People keep bees in many different kinds of hives, but we will focus on a cheap and simple design, called the Honey Cow.

The Honey Cow is designed to mimic nature as much as possible. Unlike commercial hives, it does not have frames, foundation or excluders. Instead, it just has top bars, allowing the bees to do what they would in a fallen log: build beautiful, natural combs. Because it is less intrusive to the bees, it's easier to make and manage, which makes it a perfect beginners backyard hive.

Once you have a hive, you will want to gather a few extra bits of equipment, like a veil, a smoker, and a bee feeder. With your equipment at hand, you can explore ways to get your bees, from capturing a swarm to buying a package or nucleus from a fellow beekeeper. After your bees have had a full summer to build up honey, you can start reaping the rewards of tending bees: wonderful, home-grown honey.

I encourage everyone interested in beekeeping to join a local bee club. These clubs are filled with wonderful people who love to help get beginners started. Don't be discouraged if folks in your bee club don't have the same type of hive as you. There are as many ways to keep bees as there are beekeepers.

### Kits, Bees, Supplies

Gold Star Honeybees is an excellent resource for top bar hive beekeepers. They offer kits, information, tools, and accessories for top bar hive beekeeping. They feature three levels of DIY hive kits for both novice and experienced beekeepers. You can find them on the web at <http://www.goldstarhoneybees.com/>

Gold Star Honeybees

PO Box 1061, Bath, ME 04530

207-449-1121

<http://www.goldstarhoneybees.com/>



## Step 1: Materials and Tools

### MATERIALS:

55 gallon plastic barrel, preferably food grade (makes two hives)

22 feet of 1"x2" nominal lumber

46 feet of 1½"x1" lumber

2 X 8 foot of 2"x4" nominal lumber

A 3 feet by 4 feet piece of tin

20 - 1½" wood screws

10 - 2" wood screws

8 - ½" screws

Bungee Cord or tie wire

45 feet thin moulding OR natural fiber string and beeswax

### TOOLS

circular or jig saw

drill

tin snips

tape measure and marker



## Step 2: The Barrel

Cut the barrel in half lengthwise, making sure that there is a bung hole in each half.

Clean it well. You never know what was in it. Choose a food-grade container to avoid potentially dangerous chemicals.

Lay the barrel down like a canoe, so that it would catch water. This is the position it will be in from now on.

On one end of the barrel (which used to be the top when it was whole) there is a rim of plastic that protrudes. Cut this away.

Rub the interior with beeswax. This will remove any foreign smell that remains and make it more attractive to a hive. A drop or two of lemongrass oil is good as well.







### Step 3: The Frame

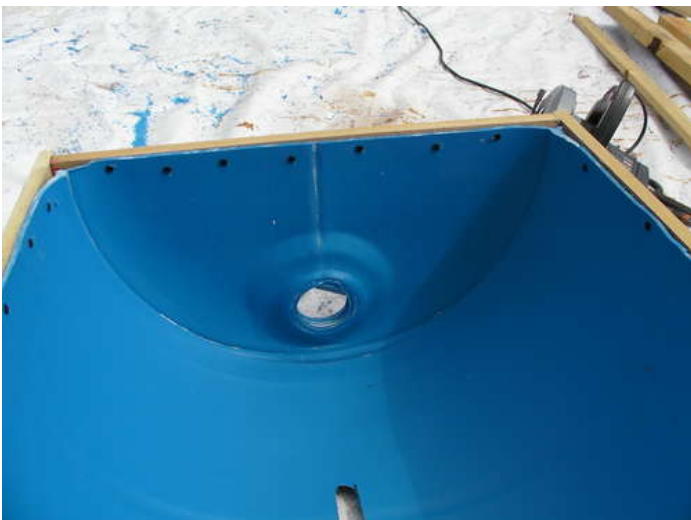
Measure the length and width of your barrel and cut the 1"x2" lumber to make a frame. For example, if your barrel is 36" by 24", cut 2 lengths of 25" and 2 lengths of 37" (the extra inch allows you to screw one piece into the next).

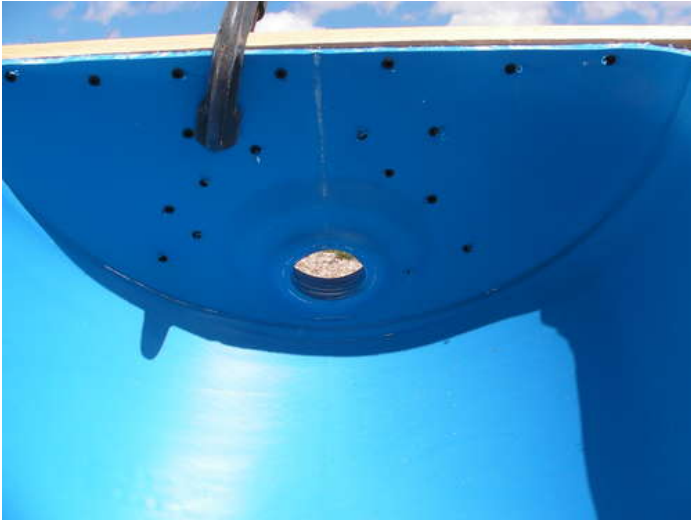
Glue and screw the frame together.

Screw the barrel inside the frame.

Cut the 2"x4" boards into 40" pieces. These boards are now the legs.

Screw the legs into each side of the barrel. Make sure you screw the frame to the leg and put several screws from the barrel into the leg for a good, sturdy fix.





#### Step 4: Top Bars

Cut 23 X 24" lengths out of the 1 1/2"x1" lumber.

These are the bars to which the bees will attach their honeycomb. However, you need to provide a guide so that they make straight combs. There are several ways to do this, for example:

a) Screw a thin piece of moulding, 20" in length, centered on each top bar, with at least an inch on the ends of the top bar. This moulding will face down, into the barrel, when the bar sits on the frame. Rub some bee's wax on the moulding.

or

b) Attach a piece of twine, coated in wax, also centered on the top bar, at least an inch from the ends of the top bar.

or

c) Carve a narrow groove into the top bar and fill it with molten bee's wax. The groove should be about 1/4 of an inch wide, and you need to leave at least an inch on either end of the top bar.





### Step 5: The Roof

Using the 1"x2" lumber, make a frame that fits around the barrel frame, with a ¼" gap on all sides.

If you cut 2 lengths of 25" and 2 lengths of 37" for the barrel frame, cut 2 lengths of 27 ½" and 2 lengths of 39 ½" for the roof frame.

Take the piece of tin and screw it to the frame, leaving equal space on all sides.

Bend the extra bits of tin down and screw to the sides of the frame.

Using the tin snips, cut any extra bits hanging below the frame.

Put the roof on top of the barrel frame.

Wrap the bungee cord around the roof and barrel, attaching it to itself. This will prevent the roof from blowing off. Alternatively, you can use a few bits of tie wire to tie the roof securely to the hive.





### Step 6: Ready for Bees

You are now ready for the bees. You can buy a “package”, a queen and bees, however the most satisfying way to get into bee keeping is to capture a swarm.

Get a package here: <http://www.goldstarhoneybees.com>

When dealing with bees, you cannot think of them as individuals. It is the hive, as a whole, that is the animal. And in this sense, each year, if conditions are right, the hive will reproduce, sometimes several times over. If they have filled the space they inhabit and food is abundant, they will create another queen and the hive will split, creating a swarm. This swarm, laden with honey, will leave the hive in search of a new home.

The swarm is heavy with food and preoccupied, and consequently very docile. Be sure to wear protection when handling swarms, because bees can always sting, even when they are docile. If you come across a swarm on, for example, a branch, you can put a box beneath them, shake the branch, and the bees will fall into the box. Take that box to your hive and empty it into your barrel. They will do the rest.





## Step 7: Resources

Gold Star Honeybees is an excellent resource for top bar hive beekeepers. They offer kits, information, tools, and accessories for top bar hive beekeeping. They feature three levels of DIY hive kits for both novice and experienced beekeepers. You can find them on the web at <http://www.goldstarhoneybees.com/>

### Gold Star Honeybees

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<http://www.goldstarhoneybees.com/>

<http://www.velacreations.com/bees.html> - author's website

<http://biobees.com> – natural beekeeping forum

<http://warre.biobees.com/bfa.htm> – the people's hive and natural beekeeping theory



## Related Instructables



**Honey Harvest and Extraction**  
by neighborhoodfruit



**Bee Hive in a Bucket** by Thinkenstein



**Just a few tips**  
by olive6608



**Harvest and Extract Honey**  
by fritz.bogott



**Save the bees from extinction! You CAN do it.**  
by gaiatechnician



**Make a cob Bee Block for solitary bees** (video) by gaiatechnician

## Comments

40 comments

[Add Comment](#)



**velacreations** says:

Any questions related to management of a top bar hive, please make sure you visit this forum: <http://biobees.com/forum/index.php>

Most of your questions can be answered there by lots of folks that have more experience than me.

Apr 8, 2011. 7:49 AM [REPLY](#)



**glauzon** says:

Where the heck do you get those barrels?

Apr 12, 2011. 6:25 PM [REPLY](#)



**Ev** says:

Try commercial food production places, bakeries, etc. They get bulk ingredients in big drums.

May 1, 2011. 4:43 PM [REPLY](#)



**barrem01** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 11:06 AM **REPLY**

While there are some advantages of the top bar hive over the more traditional Langstroth [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langstroth\\_hive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Langstroth_hive), I have to take issue with your comparison.

1) Is a top bar hive less "intrusive to the bees" than a Langstroth hive? In the wild bees live in cavities in upright (usually living) trees. They tend to build vertically rather than horizontally. Top-bar hives coerce the bees to expand horizontally. Both top-bar and Langstroth hives encourage bees to build straighter comb than they would normally. Harvest from a top-bar hive requires destruction of comb, which the bees will have to rebuild. This is not required in a Langstroth hive. I don't think it's accurate to describe a top bar hive as "less intrusive to the bees".

2) Is a top bar hive "easier to manage" than a Langstroth hive? It seems to me that devotees of the top bar hive tend to believe in less management. They seem to think that letting the hive die is the best way to deal with disease. Obviously, if you're not going to check for and treat disease, you're going to have less "management" to do. Unfortunately, until your sick hive dies, your bees will become a disease and parasite vector to infect my bees when they meet at flowers or water sites. But having a philosophy of less management does not mean that the hive itself is easier to manage. Top bar hives are a little bit harder to examine and harder to get feeding equipment for. I don't think it's accurate to describe a top-bar hive as "easier to manage"

3) Is a top bar hive "easier to make" Yes. Definitely. But if you're going to pay \$50 for a package of bees, don't you want to give them the best chance of making it through the year?

I may be a bit shrill on the subject of disease because my bees in Queens, NY are still verroa (an insidious bee parasite) free. There are very few places in the US that can claim that.

If you happen to be in the New York City area and want to learn more about beekeeping here, please join our group <http://www.nycbeekeeping.com/> we have a very extensive free class and group extraction parties.



**cre814me** says:

Apr 16, 2011. 7:11 AM **REPLY**

Barrem01 - Great points. I live in NC, and work both types. I have captured a swarm, and taken bees from a good hive to start the top bars. The swarm did not make it, due to wax moths, and the other hive is doing great. I think that the difference comes down to how much one wants to pay to start, as the top bar can be made for very little if one has access to scrap. Also, I was able to put a viewing window in my top bars so observation is easier. If you go to Velas links, he has what appears to be a good plan to capture a swarm.

We have 24 Langstroths, and I am sure you can figure out why.....\$

I really would have to say that it is up to the individual. Anyone helping the bees is ok in my book, and thanks for posting this, but for the hobbyist, just read about it, and determine which one you like. Also, I highly recommend anyone that would like further reading, Try this guys site! <http://www.bushfarms.com/bees.htm>

Cre



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 6:39 AM **REPLY**

1) If you are not taking comb, you are making foundation, which means that you are dictating cell size to the bees. This is extremely intrusive, and natural cell size is a decent deterrent to varroa. Langstroth also requires that you open the entire hive for inspection, whereas a top bar you can remove one comb at a time. Every time you open that hive it disturbs the bees.

2) There is no question that top bars are easier to manage. Or one thing, they are very "hands off". Letting a hive die is not the best way to deal with disease. Natural cell size, less disturbance, large populations, and selective genetics are the most appropriate ways to deal with disease.

Lifting one bar at a time is easier than lifting a whole super. No need for an extractor. Top bars are easier to examine, and we never have an issue feeding our bees.

3) Top bars and natural beekeeping enjoy a higher survival rate than the typical 30%-50% loss the Langstroth is currently experiencing. The best chance for bees to survive is a less intrusive bee handler. Feral hives are not experiencing the same level of die off as the commercial hives.

What sort of procedures do you take to prevent varroa? Chemicals? Management techniques?



**barrem01** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 8:55 AM **REPLY**

1) It's true that if you use standard foundation, you'll affect comb cell size. I haven't seen any peer reviewed research that indicates cell size affects hive health. Please post references for that assertion. I assume by "open the hive" you mean "remove the cover that prevents the bees from getting rained on". You've got to do that to inspect no matter what kind of hive you have. But maybe you're talking about separating supers which you have to do with a Langstroth hive but don't have to do with a top bar hive. On the rare occasion when I feel the need to completely deconstruct the hive, my supers are laid out next to each other side by side. That provides about as much open surface on top as an open top bar hive. You haven't convinced me that inspection of a Langstroth hive is more disruptive than inspection of a top bar hive. On the other hand, I know I'm less likely to break comb inspecting a Langstroth hive, which allows the bees to attach comb to fixed frames on the sides as well as at the top (which they do in nature) than when inspecting a top bar hive. Breaking comb is disruptive. But I'll allow that with care, it probably doesn't happen often and the difference is probably not significant to the health of the hive.

2) I'm glad to hear you don't believe in letting hives die as a response to disease, but you haven't explained HOW a top bar hive is easier to manage or exactly what you mean by "hands off" if you don't mean "let nature take its course" You mention the cell size argument again without citing any research to back your claim. I'm happy to agree with you that good breeding is an excellent tool in bee health. You mention the need for an extractor, but there is none. An extractor is an option available to frame based hives that is not available to top bar hives. I can squeeze wax as easily as the next guy. I'd rather not because our club makes extraction a party, not a chore, it wastes less honey, and it leaves me with drawn comb that the bees don't have to manufacture next year. I'm glad to hear you haven't had a problem with feeding your bees, For my edification can you direct me to information about feeding equipment for top bar hives?

3) I suspect that you're comparing apples to oranges here. Commercial beekeepers are experiencing huge losses. That's probably because their hives get carted around the country from month to month and are exposed to a much higher variety of diseases, parasites and pesticides. In addition, they are kept at greater population densities - hives per square foot of apiary - than occur in nature. Top bar hives are typically not carted around on trucks to various farmers to pollinate their crops. If you have any peer reviewed research that compares the health of stationary top bar hives to stationary Langstroth hives, I'd be glad to read it.

Top bar hives have been around much longer than Langstroth hives. Yet they are a small minority of hives under human management. If you want to say it's cheaper or more fun to keep a top bar hive, fine. But if you want to say it's better for the bees, or requires less management, I just want to see some evidence.

My bees were a mite resistant strain that were treated for varroa before they were brought across the Hudson. Since then, I've been doing monthly drop tests (O.K. I skipped Dec and Jan, the snow was too high). If (probably when) I see varroa, I'll treat with medicine. I use Frontline to keep ticks off my dog and I'll use Mite-away to keep parasites off my bees. In my experience when something is sick, medicine is usually better than not medicine.

Besides genetics (which I use) and cell size, what do you use to treat varroa?

And if I've mis-characterized your approach, if you do treat infected hives and are vigilant to catch disease as early as possible, I apologize.



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 9:45 AM **REPLY**

1) you can look at the various top bar forums for evidence directly from top bar beekeepers....

"I assume by "open the hive" you mean "remove the cover that prevents the bees from getting rained on". You've got to do that to inspect no matter what kind of hive you have."

The difference being that the top bars for a solid "roof" underneath the official roof, whereas the Lang has gaps between frames, effectively opening the hive to the sky. Every time you remove the roof or a super on your Lang, you are greatly affecting the internal hive climate. You're open surface is at least 3X the open space of a top bar hive when removing honey.

If you inspect the brood chamber at all with a Lang, you are definitely disrupting the hive significantly, whereas the top bar only require one bar at a time.

2) "hands off" means that I am not adding supers, cleaning supers, making foundation, and applying chemicals to your hives. That's a lot less work right there. Lifting a minimum 30 pounds for a super or lifting a 3lb top bar. Feel free to google for top bar feeders, I just insert a 1L bottle inside the hive with a small hole in the lid. You can also feed dry sugar in the base. I keep feeding to a minimum. biobees.com forum has tons of top bar information.

3) In my bee clubs locally, even the commercial keepers who do not move their Langs are still experiencing significant losses. And they spend 3-4 times the annual maintenance as the top bar keepers.

"Top bar hives have been around much longer than Langstroth hives. Yet they are a small minority of hives under human management." do you have evidence to support this claim? outside of the developed world, Langs are a minority, mainly because of cost.

I use diatomaceous earth to keep ticks off my dogs, and powdered sugar if I have any sight of varroa (none yet).

"In my experience when something is sick, medicine is usually better than not medicine."  
who is medicating the feral hives?

I personally don't have to catch disease, because I haven't had any instance of it, yet. I monitor my hives weekly, just keeping an eye out for abnormalities.



**barrem01** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 12:43 PM **REPLY**

O.K I'm beginning to see where you're coming from. Because it takes less physical effort to pull every frame out of a top bar hive you're equating that with "less management", It seems you still inspect the hive as often as I do, but perhaps you can do it a bit more quickly.

But you're confusing the issue in a couple of places. Yeah, I have to lift a 30 lb super a couple of times a year, but 90% of that weight is honey. You may only be lifting a 3 lb bar, but you're going to have to make 10 trips to my one. Unless your hive produces less honey than mine.

Our differences on the value of "natural" vs. "medical" responses to disease and parasites really aren't important to the discussion of the relative merits of the hive design. You can treat a top bar hive with medicine, or you can treat a Langstroth hive with powdered sugar. I doubt you would argue that it's less effort to sugar each frame of a hive than it is to drop in a mite-away strip, but that's really beside the point. Either approach could be used in either style hive.

I'm sorry to hear about losses in the commercial members of your club, but again, I don't think it's reasonable to compare the losses of high population density commercial apiaries with small scale hobbyists. And while one club's experience over one or two years is evidence worth examining, it's not a controlled study.

It's true I don't have proof of my assertion that most hives under management are Langstroth hives, but looking at the top 10 honey producers in the world, <http://www.suite101.com/content/top-honey-exporting-countries-a34780> my goggling couldn't find top bar hive pictures for any of them (except the US where we know top bars are a minority). Still not proof, but I honestly looked for contrary evidence to my assumption and couldn't find it. Have you got any? It's true that cheaper hives are more common in the poorer areas of the world, but that's not where the most honey is produced, so I'm guessing that's not where most of the managed bees live.

Speaking of proof of assertions, did you have any for yours that cell size is important to hive health?

I wrote a great argument here about medication and feral hives, but it's off the topic of hive design, so I'm going to leave it out.

I'm glad to hear your bees are healthy. I wish you and your bees a long and disease free life.

I'm surprised (but glad) to hear you've got no varroa. Are you on an island in Maine?



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 1:43 PM **REPLY**

I don't have to lift the 10 X 3lb bars all at once. I take 2-3 every 3 weeks or so, depending on the honey flow. I cut them right there into a bucket, so at most, I am carrying 10 lbs every few weeks. For those of us with bad backs, it does make a big difference.

I don't necessarily open up the hive every week for an inspection. I can open a far bars to see if anything is suspicious, if I think it is needed. I rarely open the brood part of the hive, and if I do, it is usually one or two bars.

You're right, any hive can be managed in any number of ways, so the hive design itself isn't necessarily what makes a management technique more successful. I recommend that new keepers use the cheapest, easiest system they can find. For me, that is top bar hives (both vertical and horizontal). The start up investment is low, and the management most commonly associated with this type of hive is very low.

Just watching and observing your bees seems to be the best thing a beekeeper can do.

If you sugar a hive, usually you blow it in as a dust. You want to cover the bees, not the comb.

I have to question the logic that the majority of honey isn't produced in the majority of the world. Records of honey production are really only available for commercial activities. I rarely see a hobbyist report their honey production. Does that mean that their production doesn't exist? no, it means that it isn't reported. The question here might be are there more hives under hobbyist/non-reporting keepers or commercial operations.

As far as the cell size issue, yes, lots of people have had success with that. Please follow the links to the discussion forums, and a google search will yield plenty of examples.

I also wish you great health with your hives. At the end of the day, we have the same goal, healthy bees. I imagine that there are numerous paths towards that goal.



**greatpanda** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 7:47 PM [REPLY](#)

From what I've read, it seems that when "feral" bees are allowed to build their own comb, they do so with smaller cells than if they build on printed foundation. This limits the size of the full grown bees, which then have smaller trachea and therefore just aren't susceptible to tracheal mites. That's usually the case against the traditional Langstroth, at least if printed foundation is used. Starter strips in Langstroth frames and top bar hives appear to be relatively similar in terms of bee health.



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 6:40 AM [REPLY](#)

printed foundation can also carry disease and additional costs for the beekeeper.

Many natural beekeepers enjoy less varroa infection than their commercial counterparts.



**barrem01** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 6:15 AM [REPLY](#)

That doesn't seem likely to me, but I suppose it's possible. This 5 year study on the effect of cell size on tracheal mite infestation by the USDA found no correlation

<http://www.beesource.com/resources/usda/natural-suppression-of-honey-bee-tracheal-mites-in-north-dakota-a-five-year-study/>



**fuzzface009** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 8:05 AM [REPLY](#)

I think I would have a problem if I set one out. I am in NE PA and we have bears. how to keep them from the hive?



**littlebuddha4** says:

Apr 10, 2011. 8:03 PM [REPLY](#)

put a electric fence around yr hives, no bears in oz but have seen it done in the US



**Madrigorne** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 2:30 AM [REPLY](#)

I guess you could situate the hive up somewhere high up - like on an upper desk, patio, or roof rack, but you must be sure its safe from wind blowing it over, and that you can safely access it.



**Z.Backas** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 3:25 PM [REPLY](#)

Thank you very much for this! Because of it, I am definitely going to start beekeeping this summer. I'll post my hive when it's finished.



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 4:13 PM [REPLY](#)

be sure to read as much as you can on beekeeping, and attend some local bee clubs before you get started.



**mdeblasi1** says:

Apr 3, 2011. 8:10 AM [REPLY](#)

Did I miss how one gets the honey out of the barrel?  
Does it just come out of the bung hole in the bottom?  
Isn't it bound up in discrete capsules of wax.

I would love to keep some urban bees here in Columbus, this may be the idea for me.  
Marya



**velacreations** says:

Apr 3, 2011. 9:12 AM [REPLY](#)

The bees make honey comb on the top bars throughout the barrel.

To harvest, you pull out each bar at a time, cut off the comb into a bucket. At that point, you can chop and press the comb to get the honey.

To get started with bees, please check out the information, videos, and kits at <http://www.goldstarhoneybees.com/> . You'll learn a lot about how these hives are maintained and what is going on inside. The kits they have are really good for beginners, because they come with equipment and everything you need to get going.



**jam906** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 9:13 AM [REPLY](#)

Nice instructable! This looks like a great design for a hive, but you seem to have no method of excluding the queen from the honeycombs you are harvesting.

Bee keepers rely on a queen excluder (usually a wire mesh) to stop the large queen accessing some of honeycombs so that only the worker bees

can access them and fill them with honey. Without a queen excluder - as with this design - the queen will lay her larvae in most or all of the cells, preventing you from harvesting usable honey.

Please don't get me wrong, I think what you've done here is great, and I'd like to try it myself, but how do you overcome this issue?



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 6:43 AM [REPLY](#)

We don't use queen excluders, and we never have an issue. The Queen tends to lay in the front of the barrel, and that is the brood area.

Most commercial setups use a queen excluder because their hives are quite smaller than this. The queen is restricted to a smaller brood area than she would naturally have.

Allowing the hive plenty of room to make their brood area large, but manageable, allows for the queen to keep the brood concentrated, not throughout the whole hive.



**jam906** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 11:05 AM [REPLY](#)

Ah I see, after some research into natural beekeeping it makes a lot of sense. We have 2 of the commercial hives you described, but I will definitely be giving the natural approach a try.



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 1:47 PM [REPLY](#)

That's a good idea, try a different approach and let us know your results. It is good to have 2 different types to compare.



**greatpanda** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 7:48 PM [REPLY](#)

Queen excluders aren't entirely necessary

<http://beehuman.blogspot.com/2011/03/viewer-mail.html>



**ProvideYourOwn** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 9:48 AM [REPLY](#)

I have tried twice to populate this exact hive (down to the blue barrel) with bees. Both times the bees left as soon as they liberated the queen. The second time, we forcibly confined them to the hive for a period (several days I think), but they still left the minute they had the chance.

I talked to a professional beekeeper, and he thinks the bees left because it was not a comfortable house for them, particularly on account of the lack of foundation. For our frames, we cut a groove, and waxed in about an inch of foundation. There was one other difference - we cut out the bottom of the hive and attached screen mesh in place for mite control.

After the two failures, we tried a standard hive body, frames & foundation in the same location, and no problems. Any ideas on why we can't make the topbar hive work? Could it have been due to the lack of a bottom? The langstroth hive we built also had a mesh bottom, but it sat on a bottom piece that had plywood under it, so from the bees' perspective I would think it was enclosed.



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 7:51 AM [REPLY](#)

Was your barrel food safe?

I wonder if the bottom screen lets in too much light?



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 6:44 AM [REPLY](#)

I imagine that your barrel may have a smell or some other deterrent. Wash really well and then coat the inside with something like beeswax.



**barrem01** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 11:19 AM [REPLY](#)

I don't really think it's the lack of foundation, (although vacated existing comb is one of the things that attracts a wild swarm to a new site). My first guess would be the former contents of the barrel bothered the bees.

You also might want to check out Tom Seeley's excellent book *Honeybee Democracy* <http://www.amazon.com/Honeybee-Democracy-Thomas-D-Seeley/dp/0691147213>

Dr. Seeley has been doing scientific research on how honeybee swarms choose a new site for many years. The thrust of the book is about communication within the hive, but much of his site selection research is covered as well.



**marcintosh** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 1:34 PM [REPLY](#)

Excellent! Thank you!

I've been dragging a 15 gallon blue barrel around with me for years. I knew that I'd find a home for it sooner or later.

I just couldn't bear to toss such a large wad of plastic into the land fill. Recycling wouldn't take it - no markings.

*PLUS* I've been looking to make a top bar hive - and now I've got the goods for **TWO**. *I WIN!*

Thanks again,

M.



**velacreations** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 7:50 AM [REPLY](#)

Just make sure it is food safe.



**lucek** says:

Apr 8, 2011. 6:28 AM [REPLY](#)

I looked into this some years back. It seemed an interesting hobby, Then I saw the zoning and red tape.

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**littlebuddha4** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 3:55 PM [REPLY](#)

thank you very much for this as i needed a very cheap way of making hives was looking at topbar hive so this is what i was looking for i can pick up plastic barrel for 10\$ so a very cheap hive

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**Idestevens** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 2:32 PM [REPLY](#)

How do I make sure I don't end up with Killer Bees?

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**Alderin** says:

Apr 7, 2011. 3:33 PM [REPLY](#)

Buying a starter is the easiest way to be sure. Capturing a swarm in the Northern states that are killer bee free is the next best bet. Though, from the looks of it, they aren't that common

[USDA Info](#)

[Map](#)

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**iPodGuy** says:

Apr 4, 2011. 9:46 AM [REPLY](#)

Great instructable!

I appreciate a good 55 gallon drum project and I really like i'bles about bees. And, an added bonus for me - you showed your completed project in use.

Nice work and thank you!

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**thelastonekills** says:

Apr 4, 2011. 2:27 AM [REPLY](#)

thanks heaps, i have always thought it would be interesting to get a hive and learn how not to kill bees,  
2 small questions

1. for people in australia any ideas where to get the bees to start with (and maybe what type, victoria slightly cool climate)

and 2 if u alrady have a few bees around your place would they kill or out compeat a hive?

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**velacreations** says:

Apr 4, 2011. 7:09 AM [REPLY](#)

1. the best thing would be to talk to local beekeepers and/or join a bee club in your area. They'll be more knowledgeable about the bees available in your area.

2. No, usually they do just fine.

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**sarahfish** says:

Apr 3, 2011. 12:35 PM [REPLY](#)

Was SO excited to see this in the last MAKE, thanks so much for the ible!  
The detailed pictures are great!

We just finished our first year with bees, and unfortunately, we're moving out of the country, so we won't get the big harvests off the established hive. I can't wait to get one of these set up when we get settled, but easier to come by than traditional hive boxes!

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**velacreations** says:

Apr 3, 2011. 1:08 PM [REPLY](#)

thanks for the kind words! Let us know if you get any set up when you get settled!

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