

Quick Start Guide to Natural Beekeeping with the Warre Hive



How you can use
the Warre Top Bar Hive
to Create a Smart, Simple and
Sustainable Beekeeping Experience

BY NICK WINTERS

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Introduction

Hi, I'm Nick Winters. I am a beekeeper in Northern Colorado, USA. I used to keep honeybees in the ten-frame Langstroth Beehive. Maybe you do too!

I used the Langstroth beehive because that was the beehive that everyone else was using.

But after a while, I found some problems with it...

- It was not simple. There were a lot of parts to put together and maintain.
- It was not sustainable. The manufacturing and transportation of a Langstroth hive requires much energy and outputs large amounts of carbon into the environment.

What I needed was a beehive that was smart, simple and sustainable. If only I had known about the Warre Hive! I would have saved so much time and trouble over the years.

You see, the Warre Hive is simple and sustainable. Developed by a beekeeper in France, the Warre Hive can give you the sustainable beekeeping experience you have been searching for.

I know you'll find this report a great resource to help you get started with the Warre Top Bar Beehive.

Kindest regards,

Nick Winters - <http://diybeehive.com>

What is a Warre Top Bar Hive?

Good Question! Glad you asked...

A Top Bar Hive is a beehive with no frames or wax foundation. In a Top Bar Hive, the honeybees create all the wax cells from scratch, just like they do naturally in the wild.

Instead of frames, a Top Bar Hive has Top Bars. If you took a normal frame and removed everything but the uppermost part...that is a Top Bar. Simple, but effective!

Why Top Bars?

Top Bar Hives allow the bees to build beeswax the way they want to, instead of forcing them to build cells from pre-pressed wax foundation. This is more natural, since the bees are building the beehive how they want it, instead of being forced to build the hive how mankind wants it.

That is more bee-friendly and ultimately, more sustainable.

A Vertical Top Bar Hive is basically a tower of small Top Bar Hives stacked one on top of the other. Each small top bar hive is called a Hive Box.

You can see photos of one below.

Each Hive Box has its own set of Top Bars. When the hive boxes are stacked on top of each other, the top bars in each box provide a foundation for the bees to build comb on.



Hive Box with all 8 top bars



Hive Box with 4 top bars

The honeybees start building the honeycomb in the top hive box. They build downward towards the bottom of the hive. When they reach the bars of the next hive box, they stop building and start building the comb on those top bars.

Smart Beekeeping with Top Bar Hives

Whenever they come to a set of top bars, the bees stop building comb, and begin again on the bottom side of those top bars.

They do this because they need bee space between the bottom of the comb and the top of the top bar. They need about 4 mm worth of space to move around in.

This is smart beekeeping! That 4 mm of space allows you to remove the hive boxes easily. Since each box is one unit of honeycomb, each box in a Warre Hive can be worked with independent of the others. This makes for very easy honey harvesting.

If a Top Bar breaks, you can just replace it with another one. After all, it is just a piece of wood. If one breaks, you don't have to build another costly frame. You can just cut another piece of wood.

Top Bar Hives are Simple to Maintain

Most beehives can be time consuming to maintain. The Warre Hive is not.

The idea behind the Warre Hive is to create a natural and bee-friendly home for the bees. The best way to achieve this is to keep out of the beehive. This translates to very low beehive maintenance on your part.

Natural beehives in the wild survive and thrive without the help of mankind. If you give your bees a good home to live in, they will survive and thrive too. If you just let them do their own thing, they will get along just fine.

You don't have to open your hive to help them survive. When we humans open a beehive, we destroy the heat and scent environment the honeybees work so hard to maintain. It is very easy to hurt the hive if one is not careful.

Of course, sometimes it is necessary to open the beehive. You need to open the beehive to take off honey. Also, you may need to add some natural remedies for diseases and mites.

Other than that, the Warre Hive (and any hive) does best when mankind leaves it alone.

If you do want to watch your bees, you can put observation windows into your beehive. Then you can see the bees without opening the beehive.

This is a Warre Hive with observation windows.



Picture Courtesy David Heaf

Why Should I Use the Warre Hive?

Another great question! Here is the answer:

You should use the Warre Hive because it is a Smart, Simple and Sustainable beehive.

It is a Smart Beehive

Smart beekeeping is beekeeping that focuses on what is best for the bees. I already mentioned about not opening your beehive too often. This is just one aspect of bee-friendly beekeeping.

The Warre Hive has no foundation. This is smart because it allows the bees to make their own foundation.

Did you know that bees will make their own honeycomb faster than they will make honeycomb on pre-pressed foundation? I have seen it happen over and over in my own Warre Hives. Honeybees just want to make their own foundation.

Allowing the honeybees to make their own foundation is smarter because it allows the honeybees to decide which cell size is best for their beehive.

Natural Honeycomb Cell Size

When you let your bees build natural cell sizes, you will notice that sometimes the cells are larger than average. Other times you will notice that they are smaller than average.

Sometimes you will have small and large cells side by side. Sometimes one beehive will build a smaller cell size, and other hives will build a larger cell size.

Cells in natural honeycomb are not fixed sizes. Smart beekeeping is building a beehive that allows the bees to choose their own honeycomb cell size.

The Womb of the Beehive

The honeycomb cell is the “womb” of the beehive. It is where the new baby bees develop and grow. Pre-pressed foundation tries to force this womb size to be an arbitrary size.

Would we try to force all cats to have an arbitrary womb size? No, we let the cats do what they do naturally. Some cats are larger, and produce larger kittens. Other cats are smaller, and they produce smaller kittens. There is no predetermined womb size.

It would be crazy to force all the cats in the world to have the same sized wombs in order to produce all the same sized kittens.

But that is what pre-pressed foundation does to the baby bees. Pre-pressed foundation tries to press all honeybees into one size of "womb." It creates an arbitrary womb size.

Is this healthy for the bees?

What do you think?

Let the bees do their own thing, and they will be healthier and happier.

That is smart beekeeping.

It is a Simple Beehive

There are very few parts to the Warre Hive. There is a Roof, Quilt, Hive Box, and Floor.

That is all.

Not only are there less parts, but the parts themselves are simple to put together. If you can use a tape measure, hammer and saw, you can build a Warre Hive.

All you need is some wood, nails, cloth, a wood finish and maybe some glue.

You can build a Warre Hive for about \$50 to \$75 US Dollars.

You can even buy Warre Hives. Check Craig's List or look around online.

Try searching for "Buy Warre Hives" or "Warre Hive for sale"

Here is a list of the Warre Hive Parts.

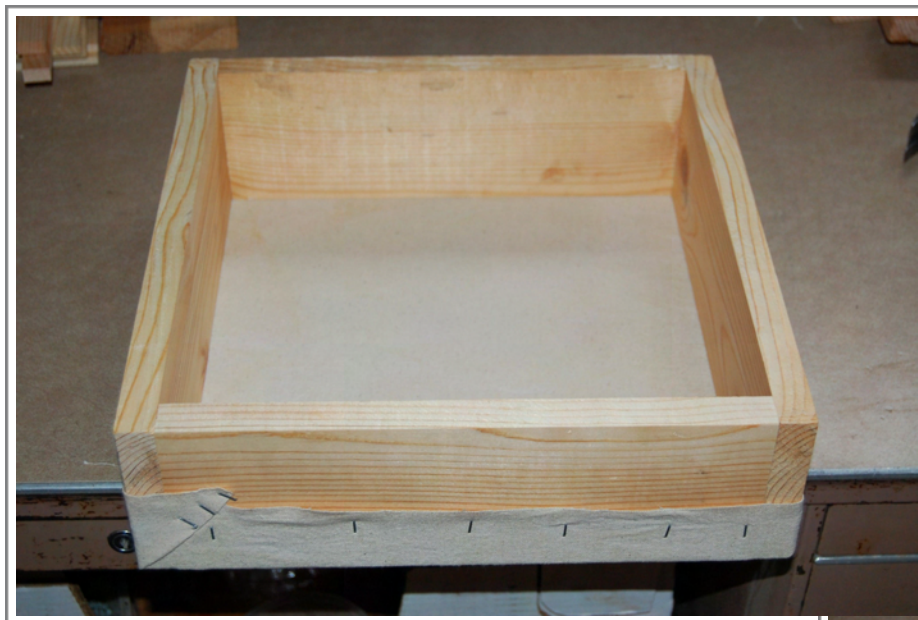
The Roof

Covers the Hive and Provides Protection From the Elements



The Quilt

Sits Under the Roof and is Filled with an Insulating Material to Provide Insulation



The Hive Box

Forms the basis of the hive. This is where the bees build their honeycomb.



Warre Hive Box with
Top Bars in place



Warre Hive Box with
No Top Bars

The Floor

This provides the foundation for the whole beehive.



Warre Hive Floor with
4 legs



Warre Hive Floor
without legs

It is a Sustainable Beehive

The Warre Top Bar Hive is a sustainable beehive. It has very few parts compared to the Langstroth hive, so you end up consuming far less material and energy while using it.

Since it has so few hive parts, you only need about 30 board feet of wood per hive.

This wood does not need to be new! You can use old barn wood, recycled wood pallets, old fencing...the possibilities are endless.

Just think of a whole apiary of beehives, all made out of recycled wood!

That is sustainable beekeeping.



Warre Hive Built from
Recycled Barn Cedar

Sure, you can build a Langstroth hive out of recycled wood, but Lang's are hard to build compared to Warre Hives.

Furthermore, you have to use frames with a Langstroth hive. Each frame requires material and energy to produce, especially if you are using plastic frames.

Plastic frames have to be thrown away when they are too old.

After you throw them away, where will they end up?

Warre Hives don't require frames. Eight simple top bars per box, cut from the same wood that you use for the hive boxes and the rest of the beehive.

Sustainable beekeeping is something we can all work towards. It is a great goal to have.

Warre Hives can help you accomplish this goal a lot faster than you thought possible.

How Do I Keep Honeybees in a Warre Hive?

There is no way to “keep” bees in any hive. The only way the bees stay in the hive is if they decide to. If they like your beehive, they will stay. If they don’t like it, or it is too small, they will leave very quickly.

So, the first rule when using Warre Beehives is not to interfere with the rhythms of the beehive. Leave the bees alone, and they will be much better off. And they’ll be calmer too.

The second rule you will want to follow is: give the bees plenty of room to build honeycomb. If you have windows in your beehive, you can watch the bees build honeycomb. You can also look through the hive entrance to see how far down the honeycomb has been built.

When they build the comb almost to the floor, you need to put in another hive box. Just slip the new box under the bottom hive box. Now your bees can build more comb from the set of top bars in the new hive box. As you add new boxes under the hive, the bees will continue building honeycomb downwards to the floor.

The third rule to keep in mind when using Warre Hives is to always leave enough honey for the bees to eat during the winter. When you take off honey, you will want to leave about 26 pounds of honey (12 kg). This will make sure your bees have enough honey to get through the winter.

It is easy to harvest honey. Just remove the top one or two hive boxes at the end of the summer. Blow the bees out of the boxes with some smoke. Cut out the honeycomb and you're done.

You don't even need a honey extractor to harvest honey from a Warre Hive!

It is easy to keep bees using the Warre Hive. There is not much else you have to do.

You could have a couple beehives in your backyard, and you would not need spend any time on them except for a couple of hours in the spring, and a few in the summer to harvest honey. Other than that, all you need to do is keep an eye on the beehive to make sure the bees are doing fine.

Common Questions

Q. How do you install a bee package into a Warre Hive?

A. Set up a Warre Hive in a good location. Put the hive box onto the floor, and remove the top bars. Spray the bees with a mixture of ½ sugar and ½ water. Then, take the queen cage out of the bee package and find the stopper that is in one end of the queen cage. Replace the stopper with a piece of marshmallow candy. Don't let the queen escape!

Lay the queen cage on the hive floor in a corner towards the back of the hive. Take the bee package and gently shake the bees over the queen cage. Shake until most of the bees are in the hive box. Lay the bee package at the hive entrance with the opening of the bee package is pointing towards the hive entrance.

Replace the top bars in the hive box. Put on the quilt and then the roof. Put some honey or a mix of 50% sugar and 50% water out for the bees to eat. Then, leave the bees alone. Do not check them. They need to be left alone for at least 3-5 days. It is important that the bees are not bothered with while they are adjusting to their new hive.

Q. How do I keep the bees from swarming out of a Warre Hive?

A. Swarming is a natural honeybee reproduction process. It is good for your bees to swarm. If you are worried that your beehive may disappear due to a swarm, you can put out Warre hives as bait hives. Swarms will often move into a bait hive that you have placed on your property, especially if it is sprinkled in the inside with lemon-grass essential oils. Lemon-grass oil is very similar to the smell honeybees give off when they are swarming. If you have a Warre Hive that has been used by bees before, you can use it as a bait hive. The bee smells in the used Warre Hive will attract other honeybee swarms.

Q. Aren't there too many drones in a Warre Hive?

A. Drones are important to the health of your beehive. The drones carry the "seed" for new bee colonies. Without the drones, new queens have no way to fertilize their eggs. It is important that your honeybees are allowed to determine the correct drone count in their hives. They know when they need to raise drones and they know when they need to eliminate drones. If you leave it to the bees, that is less work for you!

Q. Where can I get a Warre Top Bar Bee Hive?

A. If you want to build a Warre Hive yourself, you can download the Warre Hive Construction Guide at <http://diybeehive.com>