



Beekeeping Laws in Montana

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Are you interested in beekeeping, but don't know where to start? There are a number of beekeeping resources in Montana, as it typically ranks in the top five states in the U.S. for honey production.

A place to begin is by reviewing state and local beekeeping laws, as honeybees are regulated in Montana. Beekeeper registration must be paid to the Department of Agriculture by April 1 annually. Registration fees are paid to the Department of Ag and are used for regulatory programs that protect producers, consumers and the environment, as well as development and marketing programs to foster growth in Montana agriculture. Registration fees depend on which bee category is registered. There are four beekeeping registration categories in Montana: commercial, landowner, hobbyist, and pollination.

1. Commercial yards must be at least three miles from another commercial apiary

site operated by a different beekeeper. The distance can help prevent the spread of disease and pests. Commercial yards must also have at least 10 hives present from April 15 - October 15 for 10 consecutive days. Registration for a commercial yard is \$35/yard annually.

2. Landowner yards are allowed to register any number of hives at the location. For this category, the apiary must be managed by the landowner. Registration for a landowner yard is \$10/yard annually.
3. A hobbyist yard is defined as a beekeeper who has 10 or fewer hives and no more than two apiary locations. Registration for a hobbyist yard is \$10/yard annually.
4. Pollination yards are provisional locations registered for pollination of a

specific commercial seed, fruit, or other commercial agricultural product. They are only valid for the specified amount of time that a crop is in peak bloom. New beekeepers need to complete a one-time registration fee for \$10.

There are many options for joining a beekeeping association to learn more and network with fellow beekeepers, depending on location. For example, there is the Flathead Valley Beekeepers Association, the Northwest Montana Beekeepers Group, Southwest Montana Beekeepers, the Yellowstone Valley Beekeepers, and many more. There is also a group called Plan Bee, which is a group of beekeeping hobbyists who are also veterans.

If you are leasing a beekeeping site from another landowner, it is important to maintain communication with them. For many reasons, including hive health and being a conscientious neighbor, you may need to be in contact with the landowner, nearby pesticide applicators, renters, hunters, fishermen, and neighbors. Work closely with landowners to ensure that your bees stay healthy and protected, including from bears in certain areas. Ask neighbors to notify you when there will be upcoming pesticide applications. There may be a need to block, move, or net the hives to minimize pesticide exposure to the bees. You should also notify landowners and applicators when the bees arrive and when they need to be moved because the land may have changed hands and it's important to keep everyone in the area updated on the bees location. Another important way to be a good bee neighbor is to make sure that hives are easily visible to applicators. Painting the hives a bright color will help them stand out from the surrounding area. Montana law states that each apiary site must be labeled with the beekeeper's name and contact information.

Information about Montana's beekeeping laws, beekeeping associations, and various other resources can be found at the Montana Department of Agriculture Honeybee website <https://agr.mt.gov/Honeybees>.

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