

Home Grown – Matthew Lunn – April 2015

A STING IN THE TAIL

It's Sunday, 5.30am. For many of you, you are probably catching up on some much needed sleep from a hectic week of work and navigating the treacherous Toodyay Rd!.

However life at "Little Acres" never seems to stop still. The beehive needs attention and that means an early port of call for the Lunnns!!

For all you non beekeeping Gidge folk, honey bees are an amazing make up of our gardens and whether you hate or love them they almost single handedly keep many of our favourite ornamentals, fruits and vegies alive. In short bees make our gardens thrive and not die.

Our beehive is a modest affair. It sits snugly behind the shed amongst some young marri trees. I guess this is where we have gone wrong. Out of site out of mind!

However in early March the Gidge tree-scape took on a completely new look as the marri's exploded into life with the most spectacular display of cream flowers filled of course with the all-important pollen and nectar for our honey bees.

For those of you not familiar with bee hives, it is a 5 star apartment block of the insect world. Inside you will find the home of the queen, drones (male), worker bees (female) and a nursery (brood) of eggs and newly borns. The Queen is the most important bee in the proceedings and it is her DNA that dictates whether or not your hive is an orchestra out of tune or the most perfect string quartet you have ever heard. Our hive can only be described as a bunch of teenagers on a late night in Northbridge.

By 6am, I am ready to go into battle kitted out in my beekeeping attire and armored with my smoker happily puffing rosemary flavoured smoke. With the sun just popping over the easterly trees the hive is just starting to wake up. I must work efficiently and quickly trying best not to agitate some 5000 – 10,000 bees.

Quietly I creep up behind the hive. The guard bees (visible at the entrance to the hive) appear grumpy and parade around in the warm summer air. "Damn they have spotted me!". A fierce standoff looks eminent. Why did I not stay in bed?

Amiably with my puffer and hive tool I set about opening the top of the hive and lightly smoke the second tier (The super). After a few seconds I realise I have just set off a time bomb. The hive is absolutely brimming with activity and the eight frames that sit in the second floor are well and truly jammed together. After a little prizing and light smoking I gradually lift the first frame out. "JACKPOT" ...we have a full house. All 8 frames are capped with honey.

I work quickly extracting the frames and as each one is carefully lifted out, the bees become more and more inquisitive. Bees are starting to ping my veil and leather gloves and the sound is reminiscent of the start of a formula one grand prix.

Within 5 mins I am starting to think it's time to get out and carefully as the last frame is extracted I return the cleaned queen excluder and hive lid and make haste for the safety of our shed with the 8 frames all tightly sealed in a large sterile container. I have survived!!!

Extracting the honey can be done several ways. Commonly a honey extractor is used which allows frames to be spun around like one of those waltzer's at the fairground or you can do it manually by removing the capping with a hot knife and then by gently scraping the honey into a series of filtering buckets. Whichever way you do it, what you are harvesting, is raw natural honey. In total we collected 20kg of Little Acres honey which at market value can be anything from \$10 - \$15 a kg. Jarrah honey can fetch over \$20 a kg and in New Zealand Manuka is jackpotting at \$40 - \$50 a kg.

Of course there is a sting in the tail and quite literally bee keeping is less appealing to those who don't like the idea of being or react to being stung. All I can say is being stung is often the result of poor management of the hive. Hives need regular visits particularly through the warmer parts of the year to not only ensure that there is good rotation of the frames for egg laying in the 1st tier brood box but also to ensure the bees are quite literally in tune with each other and are happy and content with their living arrangements.

If having a hive on your property is not top of your list for 2015, but you want to be happy in the knowledge your prize passionfruit and cucurbits are being pollinated then I have some good news. Bees will fly up to 4km's. So those of you within that radius of Inthanoona road might get a friendly visit from our bees.

Useful contacts:

- **Guilfoyles (beekeeping equipment), 2 Wells St , Bellevue; Barry Stallman 9274 5062**
- **WA Apiarist Society; www.waasorg.au**

April Tips:

* Prepare vegetable garden for brassica plantings; Kale, cabbage and broccoli all can go in now.

* Sweet peas can be soaked overnight and then planted out.

* Fertilise lawns with Baileys Brilliance (45g per sq mtr) to improve leaf growth to choke out cool season weeds germinating during autumn.

* Portugese millipedes are on the march. For small populations you can try light catchers that are available from Stewarts pest control. For out of control populations I recommend 'Ficam' by Bayer. (Ask Rob at Gidge Rural or head to Landmark) ; \$110 a box for 10 sachets.

If you have any general gardening questions, comments about gardening in Gidge or starting a beehive please feel free to email me at info@lunnscapes.com.au or join me every Saturday on Curtin FM 100.1 from 8am–10am for the gardening show.

Matthew