

Bees Doing Their Business in the Back Yard

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First checkup after two weeks. Mike Vigo points to bee wax on the inside of the hive cover.

The bees need to get the lay of the land – eventually cruising up to three miles away to forage before coming home at dusk.

Scheck was up early enough to see the first bee come out at 6:50 a.m. May 9, noting that a brave explorer and friend landed on the ground and stopped moving. “I wasn’t sure if they died or if it was still too cold for them to make it back,” he said. By 10 a.m., he reported some had made it to the lemon tree and other nearby flowers. “By eleven, lots of activity all around and many had found the lemon tree.” In the ensuing days, there were more and more flights as the residents got settled into their new home.

So far, so good, just over a month into their tenure at the Scheck’s house, the Bee Rancher has been back periodically to check on the hive and make sure the queen is laying eggs, to watch out for pesky mites and to verify the bee’s progress – apparently they don’t like being too constrained. Their garden is thriving,

flowers and trees are buzzing with bee activity, and it looks like only one sting to their sweet, inquisitive Golden Retriever. The dog’s not explaining if she tried to eat one of the new honeybee guests, or if it was a cranky yellow jacket.

Picking the right location is good for houses, and good for hives. Morning light is preferable for the hive – to gradually warm the hive with entry and exit toward the back – so the bees don’t get spooked when they sense a person coming to check up on them. With a mini-front porch that seems to serve as a landing strip, the 8,000 bees manage getting in and out just fine, going about their business pollinating.

With sophisticated gardeners, prime habitat, an abundance of fruit trees and tons of interest in colony collapse, Lamorinda residents have embraced the hive management concept. The Bee Rancher did his homework and offers two services: Hive hosting for those who want to help out the honeybee – where the Bee Rancher owns the hives, the

bees and honey, and then sells the proceeds through his wife, Jennifer Vigo’s shop ReChic Boutique 101 in Orinda. Homeowners get up to two pounds of honey per extraction – usually twice per year, and their own personal backyard pollinators. For the 2012 season, all of the hive-hosting colonies have been placed, but Vigo can keep interested parties on a list for next year.

The second option is “a lot like a pool guy,” says Vigo. The homeowner owns the hive, the honey and the bees and he just comes to service it and manage the harvest. A third component of the business is his custom metal hive stands. “I collect used bedframes, and re-purpose them to keep the hives from eight to twelve inches off the ground,” he said. Results have been good so far. Now on version 2.0, the stands have extra long legs because of the uneven terrain of the area.

Over the summer Vigo’s ranch hands, his girls – the oldest is now 16 – will help tend to the herd of 50-plus hives and will pitch in for the honey harvest, of course when they’re not busy with sports and friends. Vigo will be out on the range visiting hives – roughly twice per month from March through October. For more information, visit www.thebeeranchers.com.



Checking for eggs, larva and mites on a frame