Who is taking care of the beehive?
Alex Meyers is the staff member who is the primary beekeeper. She is apprenticing under Roger Grape, a Master Beekeeper in training. Alex is your first point of contact for questions and can best be reached at alex@westbanklibrary.com.

What if I want to learn more about keeping bees?
There are tons of resources! Visit Austin Area Beekeeping Association or the Travis County Beekeeping Association online. The library has a lot of books about beekeeping. Stop by the library and ask us to help you locate some.

Stay tuned for news on upcoming bee-related events. If you would like to accompany Alex on a weekly hive inspection (usually on a Tuesday morning), please email her at alex@westbanklibrary.com.

Westbank Library Beehive FAQs

Why does the library have a beehive?
Excellent question! For many reasons: Bees provide crucial pollination services for both edible and non-edible plants in our community. Bees have always played an important role in pollination, but they have needed our help even more in recent years because of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), a phenomenon that has been devastating honey bee populations worldwide. The hive will be used as a platform for educational and demonstration programs for the community, aiming to inform and inspire visitors of all ages to learn and care about our friends the bees.

What kinds of bees are they?
We bought our three-pound package of bees from BeeWeaver Apiaries in Dripping Springs. They are a hybrid breed carefully selected for their mite resistance, high honey production, gentle behavior, and healthy population of bees. A hive starts with around 10,000 bees, and a thriving hive will eventually grow to a maximum of around 40,000. To accommodate the increase in population and honey stores, extra boxes called supers are periodically added to a hive.
Will the library get honey from the hive?

Honey is first and foremost the bees’ food supply, so it’s important that a hive gets well established before a honey harvest. It’s a general rule of thumb that a hive make it through its first winter, and only then is harvesting considered. If all goes well, we hope to harvest Westbank’s first batch of honey in the spring of 2019. We plan to both sell some as a garden fundraiser and donate some to local communities of need.

I was in the library’s backyard and I smelled smoke. Why?

Smoking the hive is the way beekeepers calm the bees while doing an inspection. Beekeepers believe the harmless smoke helps in two ways: it masks the “alarm” pheromones that the guard bees emit when an intruder is detected, and it tricks the bees into thinking there is a forest fire (and therefore may need to flee their home). Bees will stay busy gorging themselves with honey so they can take their food source with them, and thus don’t pay any attention to the beekeeper.

Is it safe to have a hive at a library?

Westbank is joining a growing number of libraries, schools, and people in your neighborhood with beehives. The library complies with the Austin City Code for Beekeeping, keeping our hive well beyond the required distance from residential property lines. We have a 6’ flyway barrier fence where needed to ensure the bees will fly up before dispersing on their trips. The hive is behind a locked gate at the far end of the garden, where bees have access to their own water source. If the colony begins to exhibit aggressive behaviors, the queen will be removed and replaced immediately.

Bees are part of the natural environment, and a curious bee may land on you at any time. The best way to encourage it to move is to gently blow it away. Worker bees travel as far as 3 miles away to gather pollen, so they are generally quite spread out. If you ever do see a swarm of bees, it is usually in search of a new home, and the bees will likely be docile as they are engorged with honey for the journey. Call a beekeeper to report a swarm, and the beekeeper will help relocate the bees.

As a wild creature, a threatened bee may sting as a last resort (the sting will kill the bee). People concerned about a possible allergic reaction to insect stings should carry appropriate medication with them. Any bee stings at the library should be reported to staff. We can offer ice to cool a sting.