

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

The First-Year Apiary Kit

A companion to The Beginner's Beekeeping Bible · by Amos Rutledge

Thanks for picking up the book. This is the companion you tuck into the lid of your hive: the inspection checklist you run every visit, the varroa calendar that keeps your colony alive, a season planner, and a record card to fill in. Print it, laminate it if you can — it's going to live outside.

Beekeeping isn't hard. It's just unforgiving of guessing. These four pages turn "I think the hive's fine" into "I know exactly what I'm looking at." — Amos

The 10-Day Inspection Checklist

Open the hive every 7-10 days in the active season. Calm smoke, slow movements, and run this list every single time.

Before you open

- Light the smoker first; make sure it's billowing cool white smoke.
- Two puffs at the entrance, wait 30 seconds, two under the lid.
- Have your tool, a frame rest, and this card in hand before you lift.

What you're checking, in order

1. Queen / eggs — See eggs (one per cell, standing up)? Eggs in the last 3 days = queen was alive 3 days ago. That's the goal; you rarely need to find her.
2. Brood pattern — Solid and tight? Spotty brood can mean a failing queen or disease.
3. Stores — Capped honey at the top corners, pollen (the "bee bread") near the brood?
4. Space — Are they running out of room? Add a box at 70-80% full. Crowding = swarming.
5. Pests / disease — Look for varroa on larvae, chalkbrood mummies, small hive beetles, foul odor.
6. Temperament — Sudden aggression can signal queenlessness or a predator.

If you see eggs, good stores, room to grow, and no pests — close up and walk away. The biggest beginner mistake is over-inspecting. You stress the colony and find problems that aren't there.

Varroa: Thresholds & Treatment Calendar

Varroa mites kill more colonies than anything else. You don't get to opt out of managing them — you only get to choose your method.

Test (don't guess)

Do an alcohol wash or sugar roll on ~300 bees, monthly. Result = mites per 100 bees.

Mite count (per 100)	Action
Under 1	Keep monitoring monthly
1-2	Plan treatment soon
3+	Treat now — colony is at risk
5+ (fall)	Emergency; colony may not survive winter

Treatment calendar (cool/temperate climate)

Season	Action
Early spring	Test. Light treatment if over threshold (oxalic dribble works while broodless).
Summer (honey on)	Monitor only — most treatments can't go on during a honey flow.
Late summer / after harvest	The critical one. Treat to protect the winter bees (Apivar, formic, or thymol).
Late fall (broodless)	Oxalic acid vapor — single most effective knockdown, hits mites with no brood to hide in.

Season-by-Season Apiary Planner

Spring

Reverse boxes, feed 1:1 syrup if light, watch for swarm cells, add space early. Build the colony strong for the flow.

Summer

Add honey supers ahead of need. Inspect every 10 days. Provide water. Do not treat while supers are on.

Fall

Harvest. Treat for varroa immediately after. Feed 2:1 syrup if stores are light. Combine weak colonies — two weak hives don't survive; one strong one does.

Winter

Hands off. Heft the hive to judge stores. Add a fondant block over the cluster if light. Make sure the

entrance stays clear of snow and dead bees, and the lid sheds water.

Hive Record Card (photocopy one per hive, per visit)

Fill this in at the hive — your memory will lie to you by the next visit.

Field	Entry
Date / Hive #	_____
Weather / temp	_____
Eggs seen? (Y/N)	_____
Brood pattern (good/spotty)	_____
Stores (honey / pollen)	_____
Space — boxes & % full	_____
Queen cells? (Y/N — type)	_____
Pests / disease seen	_____
Varroa count (if tested)	_____
Action taken	_____
Action needed next visit	_____

That's the kit. Your first job: get comfortable spotting eggs. Everything else in beekeeping builds on that one skill. When you've got your first colony through to a honey harvest, I'd love to hear about it — and in a couple of emails I'll tell you exactly how a quick word from you helps this book reach the next new beekeeper.

Steady smoke, slow hands,
Amos Rutledge