

BEEKEEPING EQUIPMENT – PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

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It is essential to have the proper protective equipment when journeying into beekeeping. No one enjoys being stung by bees, and a proper fitting suit, veil, and gloves will ensure safety from those pains. Protective equipment comes in a variety of protection levels. However, it would be prudent to start with a full suit and then consider lesser options as a new beekeeper learns their allergy level and tolerance to bee stings and comfort around beehives.

Veils (Fig. 1) protect only the face, head, and neck. They are generally made up of a hat and mesh fabric that can be tied around the shoulders. There is still a chance that bees can enter the veil and sting the face and head area.

Suits (Fig. 2) cover the entire body, leaving only feet and hands exposed. They may be hooded or have a hat and veil that attaches by a zipper. This is the most protective option and when zipped and sealed properly—along with proper shoes and bee gloves, the beekeeper is completely protected.



Figure 1. A beekeeper's veil

Jackets (Fig. 3) can also be purchased in hooded or veiled forms. They only protect the torso and head, but paired with proper pants, they can provide adequate protection.

Bee suits and jackets should not fit tightly. While suited, the person should be able to touch their toes without the suit or jacket pulling tight along their back or pulling the veil against their face.



Figure 2. Two types of beekeeping suits: left, a hooded style, and right, hat and veil.



Figure 3. A beekeeping jacket

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Shoes should cover the ankle to ensure that the entire body is protected. If a beekeeper does not have boots—or prefers not to wear them—many beekeeping suppliers have leg covers that can protect the ankle area. This is also a good idea for suits that have lost elasticity around the leg. The suit legs should be worn over shoes or boots—not tucked in.

For added protection around non-gentle hives, many beekeepers also use 1-inch tape to cover any accidental openings around zippers (Fig. 4). Honey bees can find and fit through small holes—even some seemingly smaller than their body—and it is not a pleasant experience to have bees inside the beekeeping suit.

When suiting up, double-check that all zippers are zipped, Velcro is attached properly, and legs are strapped and around the ankle properly. Also, inspect the beekeeping suit regularly for holes, tears, worn spots, or damaged zippers. Holes in the veil can be covered up using flexible or silicon glue.



Figure 4. Left, untaped zipper; right, tape used to close a zipper on a beekeeping suit

Suits and jackets are available in various fabrics. Polycotton (or cotton) and vented are the two most commonly used fabrics. Vented fabric is composed of layers of netting that allows air to flow and cool the body. This is a good option in Texas, as cotton canvas suits can be very hot in the summer months.

Suits can also be washed if they get dirty, although beekeepers have varying thoughts on that matter. Some beekeepers prefer not to wash their suits to allow the smell of smoke and bees to remain on the suit, while others prefer clean suits. If the suit needs to be washed, remove the hood or veil, use a mild, unscented detergent, and hang dry.

When not in use, the bee suit should be hung up to dry out and vent. A folded suit may mold.

Wearing a cap under hooded jackets or suits will keep the front of the suit from touching the face and protect the chin and nose from bee stings. Some beekeepers also prefer to wear a headband to protect their eyes from sweat and prevent their ears from touching the sides of the veil and experiencing stings.

Beekeeping gloves (Fig. 5) are specifically designed for beekeeping. They are light in color, and may be made of leather or goatskin. They generally have long arms, which can be pulled up over the elbow. The arms also vary in fabrics, ranging from very thick canvas, vented with canvas, to thin fabric. Gloves should be worn over the bee suit and pulled as far up the arm as possible.



Figure 5. Beekeeping gloves

Gloves rarely fit perfectly. When choosing gloves, it is important to remember that tighter-fitting gloves may result in stings on the knuckles, while larger gloves reduce dexterity.

Replacing beekeeping gloves every 1 to 2 years is an important management practice to prevent spreading disease from one colony to another. In addition, gloves will absorb propolis, wax, and honey; eventually start to wear out; and need to be replaced. Beekeeping gloves must be replaced more often than a bee suit, which is generally only replaced when it rips or wears holes.

Remember: Most materials used in suits and gloves are flammable and will melt or smolder if the smoker is too close to the fabric or if embers fly out of the smoker.

Additional online resource available through AgriLife Learn, Beekeeping 101: <https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=ENTO-025>