

EXPERIENCE

STORY BY DANNY LEE
PHOTOS BY PERRY REICHANADTER

Beeseason

Go to class to catch a good buzz

PERFECT APPLES, IT TURNS out, can have a lot to do with what sort of insect pollinates the blooms.

Honeybees are the correct item, says Hendricks County beekeeper and master gardener Rob Green, because they originated with the apple trees and other domestic garden and orchard produce in Europe, coming over together with settlers.

"If you want nice, fat fruit, perfectly round fruit, you need what we call proper pollination," says Green, who is also an advanced master gardener. The pursuit of better produce crops led Green into beekeeping, and now into the training of more and more beekeepers.

His nonprofit Indiana Beekeeping School — www.indianabeekeeping.school.com — offers instruction (tuition \$75) that sends students home with a high-quality starter hive buzzing with bees, and an "incredibly comprehensive" grounding in how to handle them. Hive materials cost about \$300, and a starter group of bees runs about \$80. ➤➤

Bees bring pollen to one of Rob Green's backyard hives.

Rob Green's suit protects him when he's working with his hives.



Green uses smoke to keep the bees calm.



"In the five years that we've offered it, we've probably turned out about 300 beekeepers," says Green, who also teaches computer science at ITT Tech. "My personal goal is to put hobby beekeepers in every neighborhood in every community in Indiana," he says.

"You can keep more than a dozen hives on an acre, so long as they're not crammed together and are all in sunlight during the day," though smaller populations may work out better. A hive can peak at around 80,000 bees in summer, dropping to a few thousand in winter. "For backyard beekeepers, and for good neighbor relations, (beekeepers) should consider just one or two, particularly if they're just starting out."

A sunny afternoon spent inspecting the hive every two weeks in the summer nets the beekeeper the satisfaction of providing busy little pollinators for flowers and garden vegetables over several hundred acres, plus

as much as 100 pounds of sweet, succulent honey per hive. That's beyond the 60 or 70 pounds the bees need for winter.

The hive inspections are crucial because infestations by two varieties of mites and a hive beetle have nearly wiped out feral honeybees and are a constant problem for cultivated hives.

Buzzing next door may raise eyebrows at first, but honeybees, which are generally non-aggressive when away from their hive, can be good neighbors. Even small lots can accommodate bees, since they quickly fly to heights of 15 feet or more in their foraging, well above the heads of residents.

Eventually, bees fit in fine in most neighborhoods, Green says, although there are guidelines about placing the hives too near play and work areas. Even in his own neighborhood near Brownsburg, there was some early concern. "When I first got started, there were some furrowed brows," he says. "But when they tasted the honey ... I guess I won them over." ❖

Want a little honey?

Rob Green's honey-based products, including honey, handcream, lip balm and candles, are available online at www.BluffwoodCreek.com, at Traders Point Organics, Moore Road and 87th Street, and Abundant Life Church, Hague Road and 86th Street.

■ For more information about beekeeping, swarm removal or honey products, call 892-4921.



Green points out honey.