



BeeActive Toolkit

A guide for beginner beekeepers
and young people who want to protect
bees in their community



BeeActive project · Youth for youth · Svinica, Košice Region, Slovakia
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Introduction - why beekeeping?

Bees are among the most important pollinators in the world – without them, many plants, fruits, and crops simply could not exist. Despite this, the number of both wild and managed bee colonies is declining in many regions, mainly due to loss of natural habitat, excessive use of pesticides, and climate change.

This toolkit was created as an output of the **BeeActive** project, carried out by a group of young people from the village of Svinica in the Košice Region, Slovakia, under the European Solidarity Corps programme. Our goal was to combine bee protection with strengthening active citizenship among young people in a rural community – and this document is a guide on how to implement a similar idea in your own village.

Who is this toolkit for?

- Young people and groups who want to start their first bee colony
- Communities and organisations planning their own solidarity or youth project focused on nature protection
- Anyone who wants to know how to start beekeeping simply, responsibly, and with the support of a community

Tip from BeeActive: You don't need to be an expert on bees to get started. Find an experienced mentor in your area – this kind of cooperation was one of the key factors behind our success.



First steps before you start

Before you get your first bee colony, it helps to know what you're getting into. Here is an overview of the essentials.

Basic equipment

- A beehive (most commonly a Langstroth or national-type hive) – at least one to start with
- Protective clothing and a veiled hat, protective gloves
- A smoker to calm the bees during hive inspections
- A frame lifter/hive tool and a bee brush
- Containers and equipment for honey extraction (not needed right in the first year)

Registering your bee colonies

In Slovakia, keeping bees is subject to a notification obligation – a new colony must be reported to the relevant authorities (the regional veterinary and food administration, or the central register of livestock/bee colonies). We recommend contacting your local branch of the Slovak Beekeepers' Association, which can help you with registration and your first steps. If you are in another country, check with your national beekeeping association or veterinary authority for the exact local requirements.

The best time to start

The ideal time to acquire your first colony is **early spring** (March–April), when colonies wake up after winter and begin to develop. In the BeeActive project, we deliberately scheduled the setup of new colonies and site preparation for the spring months of the project.

Rough costs: Acquiring one hive with equipment and a first colony typically costs a few hundred euros – we recommend getting an exact estimate from your local beekeeping association based on current prices in your region.



Choosing a location and hive type

Where to place your bee station

- **Sun and shade:** the hive should get morning sun and can be in light shade in the afternoon
- **Wind protection:** ideally near a hedge, building, or trees that reduce wind
- **Distance from people:** sufficient distance from footpaths, playgrounds, and residential buildings (according to local regulations, usually at least a few metres, with the flight path directed away from busy areas)
- **Water source:** nearby access to water (a stream, pond, or even a simple bowl of water with pebbles)

Hive types suitable for beginners

Hive type	Advantages for a beginner
Langstroth (frame hive)	The most widespread type, easy to handle, plenty of available information and components
National hive	A traditional type in Slovakia, readily available from local manufacturers
Warré hive	Less intensive maintenance, suitable for a more natural style of beekeeping

Experience from BeeActive: When choosing the location for our new bee station in Svinica, we followed the advice of our mentor – an experienced beekeeper we visited already in the second month of the project. This study visit saved us from many mistakes we would otherwise have made.



How to get your first colony

There are several ways to get your first bee colony. Each has its own advantages and requirements.

Method	What to know
Buying a nucleus colony from an experienced beekeeper	The safest and recommended route for beginners – you get a healthy colony of verified origin
Buying a full colony with a hive	A quick start, but a higher initial investment
Catching a swarm	Cheaper, but requires experience and a quick reaction – not recommended for absolute beginners

Find yourself a mentor

The most important first step is not equipment, but an **experienced person** who can help you with your first steps. In the BeeActive project, a study visit to a local experienced beekeeper was one of the first and most valuable activities – we learned hands-on how to care for a colony, what to watch out for, and how to react to common situations.

Where to find a mentor: the local beekeepers' association, a regional beekeeping club, or even neighbours and family members who keep bees. Many experienced beekeepers are happy to pass on their knowledge to younger enthusiasts.



Annual cycle of colony care

Caring for bees follows the seasons of the year. Here is a simplified overview of what to expect throughout the year.

Period	What's happening	Your tasks
Early spring (March–April)	Colony wakes up after winter	Health check, replenishing food stores, possibly expanding the station
Late spring (May–June)	Intensive colony growth, risk of swarming	Regular inspections, possible splits, planting for pollinators
Summer (July–August)	Main honey harvest	Extracting, processing, and storing honey
Autumn (September–October)	Preparing for winter	Checking food stores, treating against varroa mites, insulating the hive
Winter (November–February)	Winter dormancy of the colony	Minimal intervention, only occasional visual checks

How we planned it in BeeActive: We adapted our twelve-month schedule exactly to this cycle – we scheduled site preparation and planting for spring, honey harvesting and processing for summer and autumn, and used the winter months to process our results and plan our next project.



Planting for pollinators

A healthy colony needs a varied and reliable supply of pollen and nectar throughout the season. Planting suitable plants is one of the simplest things a community can do to help bees – while also beautifying public space.

Recommended pollinator-friendly plants

- **Spring:** willow, snowdrop, lilac, black locust
- **Summer:** lavender, mint, sunflower, viper's bugloss, phacelia
- **Autumn:** asters, white dead-nettle, heather

How to set up a community pollinator garden

1. Identify public or community land suitable for planting (e.g. the edge of the village, an area near a school)
2. Involve the local municipality and secure its support (approval, and possibly a small contribution towards seedlings)
3. Organise the planting as a joint community event – it's a great opportunity to involve children, seniors, and young people
4. Add educational elements – information boards, or even hive models as a visual and educational feature

Example from BeeActive: As part of the project, we built a community garden space in the village of Svinica, where we continuously plant pollinator-friendly plants and where we also installed hive models. This garden is a permanent place where the community gathers and cares for it even after the project has ended.



Processing and using honey

The honey harvest is the reward for a year of caring for a colony – but it's important to do it properly, so the honey stays high quality and the colony keeps enough reserves to survive.

Basic steps of honey processing

1. Select fully ripened honey frames (capped over at least two-thirds of the surface)
2. Uncap the frames using an uncapping fork or knife
3. Extract the honey using a honey extractor (centrifuge)
4. Filter the honey through a sieve to remove wax residue
5. Fill the honey into clean, sealable containers and store in a cool, dark place

What to do with the honey

- Distribute it within the community – for example to seniors, or as a gift at community events
- Offer tastings at public events as a way to promote the project
- Sell a small amount to support future activities (check local requirements for selling food)

Example from BeeActive: We processed the honey obtained from our new colonies with the help of interested community members, who thereby learned about honey production, and we then distributed it to seniors in the village and offered tastings at our Honey Festival.



How to engage the community and young people

Beekeeping can be done alone, but involving the community gives it greater meaning – it raises awareness, brings extra helping hands, and turns your effort into a shared cause for the whole village.

Proven ways to involve people

- **Craft workshop:** jointly producing frames, hive components, or other needed materials
- **Bee-care workshop:** an open demonstration for the public on how to care for bees
- **Involving schools:** excursions and simple presentations for children and young people
- **Joint work days:** site preparation, planting, maintaining the community garden

How to motivate young people to keep going

Our experience from BeeActive showed that the strongest motivation is a sense of ownership and responsibility. Give young people the space to take on a specific task (e.g. caring for one bee station) and support them through mentoring rather than directive leadership.

Example from BeeActive - the "Young Pollinators" initiative: The project gave rise to a group of young people who decided to continue the activities on their own, beyond the formal framework of the project – they take care of the community garden and continue to develop further environmental activities in the area.



Connecting with democratic participation

Bee protection and active citizenship may at first seem like two separate topics – in practice, however, they complement each other very well. Caring for shared public space (bee stations, a community garden) is a natural opportunity to teach young people how to work with their local municipality and take part in decisions that affect their village.

How to do it

- Organise a joint meeting of young people and municipal representatives specifically on a concrete environmental initiative (e.g. where to place a new bee station or garden)
- Give young people the chance to present their proposal directly to municipal representatives
- Document the results of this cooperation and use them as an argument for further initiatives

Example from BeeActive: We organised a workshop on youth participation directly in the village of Svinica, in cooperation with the local municipality. The aim was to open a dialogue between young people and village representatives and strengthen their involvement in decision-making – an activity that later connected directly with the practical steps of building our bee stations.

This experience convinced us that environmental topics are an excellent "entry point" for young people who might not otherwise get involved in public life – nature protection is a topic that can reach almost everyone.

Organising a community event

A public event is a great way to showcase your work and thank the community for its support. Here is a simple checklist for organising your own "honey" festival.

Checklist before the event

- ☐ Choose a suitable date (late summer / early autumn, after the main honey harvest)
- ☐ Choose a location with enough space and accessibility for all age groups
- ☐ Plan the programme – honey tasting, creative workshops for children, a short presentation of results
- ☐ Promote the event – social media, local radio, personal invitations
- ☐ Involve partners – the municipality, the school, local associations
- ☐ Prepare material for sharing the results (photos, a short video, information leaflets)
- ☐ After the event: thank participants and record their feedback

Example from BeeActive - the Honey Festival: Our flagship event included creative workshops for children, a tasting of different types of honey, and a presentation of the project's overall results. It was attended by a broad section of the local community, including municipal representatives, and we also gave some of the honey to seniors in the village.



Timeline of the BeeActive project

For inspiration, here is the actual monthly schedule of activities carried out under the BeeActive project. It can serve as a starting point when planning your own year-long project.

Month	Activity
1	Preparing promotional and educational materials; introductory workshops (craft production, democratic participation)
2	Study visit to an experienced beekeeper; preparing educational material
3	Workshop on youth participation in the village of Svinica, involving the municipality
4	Preparing the site and planting for a new bee colony
5	Craft workshop – producing material for the colonies
6	Community meeting and planning of the next project
7	Workshop on bee and bee-station maintenance for the community
8	Continued preparation of the follow-up project; project management
9	Environmental workshop and planting flowers for pollinators
10	Processing honey from the new colonies
11	Honey Festival
12	Final reflection, guide, and handing over Youthpass certificates



Common mistakes and lessons learned

During the implementation of the BeeActive project, we encountered several challenges. We share them here so you can avoid them or prepare for them in advance.

Mistake / challenge	How to avoid it
Planning activities without regard to the seasonality of beekeeping work	Plan your schedule in advance according to the annual cycle (see page 6), and leave a time buffer for delays caused by weather
Underestimating the need for a mentor	Find an experienced beekeeper before you get your first colony – it will save you time and mistakes
Insufficient communication of changes with the community	Inform people about schedule changes in advance and regularly, e.g. via social media or the local radio
Low return rate of surveys / feedback	Collect feedback directly at the activity venue, not afterwards
Focusing only on already-active young people	Actively reach out to less visible community members too, in cooperation with the municipality

The most important lesson: Open and regular communication – within the team, with the community, and with partners – was the biggest factor that helped us handle every challenge that came up during the project.



Resources and contact

If this toolkit has inspired you to start your own initiative, feel free to get in touch – we're happy to share our experience.

Contact

Youth for youth

Svinica, Košice Region, Slovakia

BeeActive project · European Solidarity Corps

Form ID: 2025-1-SK02-ESC30-SOL-000347340

Where to find us

- The Youth for youth website – the section dedicated to the BeeActive project
- The organisation's social media (Instagram, TikTok)
- The SALTO portal – this toolkit and other project outputs

Acknowledgements

We thank the village of Svinica, the local community, our coach, and the experienced beekeeper who supported us throughout the project, as well as all the young people who took part in the activities.

Want to get started too? Don't wait for perfect conditions – start with one hive, one mentor, and one community activity. The rest follows in time, as we found out ourselves.