

KANAWHA VALLEY

BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

HONEY BEE BREEDS

In the United States, beekeepers work primarily with the Western Honey bee, otherwise known as *Apis mellifera* (there are four species of honeybees in the world). There are many BREEDS (or subspecies if you prefer) within the *Apis mellifera* family to choose from and work with. Each better-known type is listed below with some brief notes about their characteristics. We recommend you research each to find the type you are interested in BEFORE you purchase. The breeds below are presented with the most commonly used first. (The following information was compiled from many sources but primarily from Wikipedia.com)

Golden Italian - *Apis Mellifera Ligustica*

The Italian honeybee is the default bee that beekeepers use. The Italian is generally considered the best general-purpose bee, and thereby is what is most often recommended to the beginner. Italian bees are also the most common stock bee, and likely are the race to be found in packages.

Pros and Cons of the Italian Honey Bee

PROS

- Good beginner bee
- Readily builds comb
- Light color worker, with dark queen makes queen locating easier
- Wonderful foragers
- Only moderate tendency to swarm
- Relatively easy and calm to work with
- Resistant to European Foul Brood
- Strong cleaning behavior
- Lower range propolis producer

CONS

- Brood rearing continues after honey flow ceases
- Builds a great deal of brace and burr comb
- Highly prone to drifting
- Head butts beekeeper as defensive action
- Short distance foragers, causing tendency to rob
- Slow spring buildup
- Susceptible to disease

Carnolian - *Apis Mellifera Carnica*

The Carniolan honeybee (*Apis mellifera carnica*) is a subspecies of Western honeybee. It originates from Slovenia, but can now be found also in Austria, part of Hungary, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia.

Pros and Cons of the Carniolan honey bee

PROS

- Earlier morning forager
- Forages on colder and wetter days than most other bees
- Overwinters well on small stores, as queen stops laying in the fall
- Rapid buildup in early spring
- Exceptionally gentle and easy to work
- Brood production is dependent on availability of supplies, hence more food more forages, less food smaller population

- Less susceptible to brood disease
- Creates less brace and burr comb

CONS

- Swarms easily when no expansion room is available
- If pollen is scarce brood rearing greatly diminishes

Caucasian - Apis Mellifera Caucasica

The Caucasian honeybee originates from the high valleys of the Central Caucasus.

Pros and Cons of the Caucasian honey bee

PROS

- Large and Strong population
- Calm when on comb
- Overwinters well by stopping brood production in the fall
- Forages earlier and on cooler days
- Has a longer tongue than most races and can thereby take advantage of more nectar sources than most.

CONS

- Slow spring startup
- Produces an abundance of propolis, which may be beneficial to propolis collectors, but makes the overall hive more difficult to work.
- Makes wet capped comb, which is poor for honey comb sale.
- Once brought to a level of alarm they are difficult to calm and easily stings.
- Susceptible to Nosema
- Prone to rob

Russian - Apis Mellifera

The Russian honeybee have evolved traits of natural mite resistance due to heavy selection pressures. They have lived for more than 150 years in a region that is home to the varroa mite and the tracheal mites (*Acarapis woodi*).

Pros and Cons of the Russian honey bee

PROS

- Thought to be naturally resistant to Varroa Mites
- Resistant Tracheal Mite
- Quick Spring buildup
- Winter tolerant

CONS

- Expensive
- More prone to swarming (likely every year)

Buckfast - Apis Mellifera: hybrid

The Buckfast hybrid was produced by Brother Adam of the Buckfast Abbey. Brother Adam crossed many races of bees (mainly Anatolians with Italians and Carniolans) in hopes of creating a superior breed. The results are what is now known as the Buckfast Bee. While the European variety of Buckfast are considered very gentle, the American variety is far more defensive. There is a debate among beekeepers if this defensiveness is due to breeding for varroa resistance or partial hybridization with the AHB (Africanized Honey Bee) of the Buckfast line in America. The issues are further clouded in that

the two leading American queen breeders are breeding for varroa resistance and are also located in AHB territory. AHB are usually considered by most experts to be more resistant to varroa than the European Honey Bee.

Pros and Cons of the Buckfast honey bee

PROS

- Highly Tracheal Mite Tolerant
- Extremely gentle, with low sting instinct
- Resistant to Chalkbrood
- Low swarm instinct
- Overwinters well

CONS

- Builds up slowly in spring
- Poor early spring pollinators

Starline - *Apis Mellifera*: hybrid

The Starline is an Italian hybrid known for its vigor and strong honey production.

Pros and Cons of the Starline honey bee

PROS

- Good brood producers
- Creates large honey crop under correct conditions
- Minimal propolis buildup
- Fast spring build up

CONS

- Poor at overwintering due to large population
- Offspring queen often do not have same traits as mother, may require common requeening.

Yugo Honey Bee - *Apis mellifera*?

Pros and Cons of the Yugo honey bee

PROS

- Low swarm instinct
- Overwinters well

CONS

- Not highly tested as it is a newer breed
- Long term keeping effects unknown

Feral Honey Bees - *Apis Mellifera*

While not technically a race in its own, feral honey bees are more likely to be acclimated to the area in which they are found.

Pros and Cons of Feral honey bee

PROS

- Likely acclimated to the area they are present in
- Often free to acquire

CONS

- Must be captured (or allow for known species to breed with feral drones)
- Unknown background, may be Africanized
- Not bred to be disease or mite resistant, but may hold some resistance to local conditions

Cordovan Honey Bee - Apis Mellifera?

Closely related to the Italian race, cordovans are used mainly for tracking the genetic makeup due to the wide variance in color.

Pros and Cons of Cordovan honey bee

PROS

– Overwinter Well

CONS

– Aggressive

– Slow Spring build up

– Difficult if not impossible to buy in the US

German Black Honey Bee - Apis Mellifera Mellifera

The German Black bee, also known as the European dark bee, was the first honeybee imported to the Americas. This distinctly marked bee is brown and black in color and over winter well.

Midnight Honey Bee - Apis Mellifera: Hybrid

The Midnight hybrid is a combination of both the Caucasian and Carniolan races.

