Choose wisely before being boxed in

It’s the time of year when many think about becoming a beekeeper or increasing their hive numbers. This involves decisions about what size and type of hive boxes will best meet your needs.

It’s a good idea to explore the options and before investing, as having hive boxes of the same size and type is easier to manage and reduces the cost in the long run

To help you decide what is best for you, here are some issues to consider if you’re looking at Langstroth hives:

1. **New or Second-hand boxes**

This is an easy one to answer.

New boxes have a higher price tag, but second-hand boxes may cost you your bees and more.

Second-hand boxes run the risk of having American Foulbrood disease which will, in the end, kill your bees, infect other hives and require you to burn your hive.

The standard advice is not to buy used hive boxes or frames.

If you do decide to go with second-hand equipment, it’s advisable to sterilise them though irradiation treatment before use to ensure they are not infected with American Foulbrood disease.

1. **Box sizes**

What width size boxes are best for you?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **8 Frame Boxes** | **10 Frame Boxes** |
| **Pros** | **Cons** | **Pros** | **Cons** |
| Lighter | Requires more management due to less available space for brood and resources. | More space for the queen and bees to grow the hive and store resources over spring and summer. | Heavier |
|  | Space limitations during growth periods may result in overcrowding and increase the likelihood of swarming. |  | More space for the bees to keep warm over winter. Needs a good-sized hive to maximise the space available.  |
|  | Less space for resources. Care required to ensure the hive is well resourced for winter. |  | Can result in a stronger hive coming into spring, increasing the likelihood of swarming. |

There are 9 frame polystyrene boxes that may be a good compromise.

Whatever width box you choose it’s advisable to adopt practices that avoid lifting boxes full of honey as you run the risk of hurting yourself. Lifting honey boxes is a two-person job or; consider the use of hive lifters; sliding boxes across at the same level to another stand or box; or moving frames to another box.

When you have decided on the width size of your box you can then consider what depth of box is best for you. There are several depths to choose from including Full Depth, half Depth, Ideal, WSP and Manley. A good strategy is to have a Full Depth box as the bottom brood box and then choose a smaller depth size as your honey box. This reduces the weight of honey box making it more manageable.

1. **Box type**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Wood** | **Plastic** | **Polystyrene**  |
| Key Advantages | High competition between many suppliers.Ability to mix and match products from many suppliers and good supply of specialist kit for hives. | Good insulation.Boxes are manufactured to a consistent high standard. | Boxes are light.Excellent insulation requiring less energy for cooling or warming.Boxes are manufactured to a consistent high standard. |
| Key Disadvantages | Boxes have poor insulation requiring more energy for cooling or warming. The quality of boxes can vary.  | Limited suppliers.Some limitations on the ability to use equipment and kit made for other types of boxes. (will this fit my boxes?) | Limited suppliers. Manufactured overseas and price may be subject to currency fluctuations.Some limitations on the ability to use equipment and kit made for other types of boxes. (will this fit my boxes?) |
| Cost  | Price of boxes varies depending on wood quality, type of construction and finish. The initial outlay for untreated flat pack kits may be less that plastic or polystyrene boxes. | Little variation in quality or price between the different brands. | Little variation in quality or price between the different brands. Price may be subject to currency fluctuations. |
| Treatment | Requires painting. Preferably including hot wax dipping. | Does not require painting. Some UV damage does occur over time. | Requires painting to stop UV damage.  |
| Issues to consider | Quality hot wax dipped, and painted boxes are purchased assembled resulting in higher freight costs. Flat pack box kits require assembly and painting, have lower freight costs but may have a shorter life span.  | Can be purchased as a flat pack reducing freight costs.Ensure that the plastic is recyclable and that you have access to a recycling yard.  | Can be purchased as a flat pack reducing freight costs. Polystyrene is recyclable but is only accepted by some recycling yards. |
| Summary  | When considering the total purchase price of good quality boxes, there is little variation between the different types.Consider factors other than the initial price when making the decision as to what box type is best for you.  |

Good quality boxes if looked after can last a lifetime.

Invest wisely.

**Tony Wilsmore**

**Suburban Bees**

There are many providers. Here are a few:

Polystyrene Boxes: <https://www.australianhoneybee.com.au/>

Wooden Boxes: <https://whirrakeewoodware.com.au/>