

20 • FEATURE

40
THOUSAND
BEES

GEORGIE
THE FARMS
INSPIRATION



BLACK
DOG
FARM

\$6
PER JAR



by maggie kissick

ZIPPING UP HER head-to-toe bee suit, white rubber gloves and polka dot rain boots, SHARE sponsor Sheryl Kaplan was ready for the first hive check-in of the season.

For the last few months, Kaplan's bees had spent the winter sealed in their four hives, staying warm and protecting their queens. But with the warm weather approaching, it was finally time for another bee season filled with checking on the hives, collecting honey and, of course, getting stung a few too many times.

Beekeeping is fairly new to Kaplan — she started five years ago. After wanting to spend more time outside of the city, she and her husband decided to purchase 80 acres of land in Mound City, Kansas. But with all this newfound space, Kaplan decided beekeeping would be the perfect hobby.

"Bees are very important to our environment," Kaplan said. "Without bees, if the plants aren't pollinated, then the plants won't replenish themselves. Whether it's vegetables, flowers or fruit trees, everything is pollinated. So having bees, I think it's exciting that I get to somewhat be a part of that."

Kaplan started her beekeeping journey by taking a class where she learned more about the lives of bees, their different jobs and how to manage a beehive. Then she purchased five frames of bees with a queen that had already mated.

Kaplan knows each hive has a hierarchy. Everyone tends to the queen, the leader and one who lays the eggs. There's only one queen per hive and the strongest queen will persevere — after fighting the other prospective queens to the death. The rest of the bees can collect pollen, nurse the baby bees or haul out the dead bodies — a "beautiful system," according to Kaplan.

Beekeeping itself takes three to five hours of commitment

OH Honey!

SHARE sponsor Sheryl Kaplan is a beekeeper at her farm, Blackdog Farm

for Kaplan every weekend.

"I really tend to kind of have a more hands-off approach [to beekeeping]," Kaplan said. "I don't get into [the hives] if I don't see a big need. So I really just check to make sure that they're all living and I will occasionally take the whole hive apart and kind of explore the lower frames to make sure that the eggs are being laid correctly and see if there's signs of the queen."

Kaplan has four hives that she checks periodically. Checking on them requires the same thing in each hive — making sure they're not overcrowded and making sure the patterns of the eggs and nectar are correct on the frames. Managing each hive is pretty routine, but that doesn't mean things can't go wrong.

I HAVEN'T GOTTEN better at not getting stung. The bees typically sting you when they're protecting their queen or their honey. I've been stung on my hands and feet after harvesting honey, that itched like crazy.

SHERYL KAPLAN • SHARE SPONSOR



"The other day one hive had blown over and I noticed there were a lot of bees up by our house," Kaplan said. "[The bees were] kind of pissy and very angry, and I had to set up the hive and rebuild it for them. But most of the time, if nothing's wrong I don't have to do much."

Kaplan wears a protective bee suit to reduce the amount of times she gets stung. With her rubber boots, hooded suit and leather gloves, she's able to somewhat protect herself from getting stung, but stings still happen almost everytime she handles one of her hives.

"I haven't gotten better at not getting stung," Kaplan said. "The bees typically sting you when they're protecting their queen or their honey. I've been stung on my hands and feet after harvesting honey, that itched like crazy. I've been stung on the inside of my nose and my whole face kind of swelled up. That was not a good look. But getting stung is part of the process."

Towards the end of each bee season in September, Kaplan is able to take her "rent" and harvest honey that the bees have produced. Kaplan harvests towards the end of each season so she can collect as much honey as possible — around two to three boxes of 60 pound honey.

With the honey, she's able to make different flavors like spiced, cinnamon and lavender. She also discovered how common beeswax is in different products, so she collects the wax cappings inside the hive and makes candles, soaps and lip balms.

Being part of the Northeast Kansas Beekeepers Association, attending classes and going to bee stores allows her to interact with fellow beekeepers who have the same passion — interactions she wouldn't get outside of beekeeping.

Kaplan is grateful for all of the benefits of beekeeping, and grateful that she gets to be a part of such a process. Kaplan didn't realize the impact of owning bees until she owned some, a hobby she stresses to anyone curious about beekeeping.

"One little bee can have such an impact on the world," Kaplan said. "Whether on the environment and in the pollination of all the different plants to the things that we create, giving us the honey, the soap making, making all the different products from that one little one little being and also just the hierarchy of how they run their community, it's taught me a lot."



ABOVE • Using the hive tool, Kaplan pulls the frames apart to spot the queen. The queen lays her eggs in the lower box. "I was checking to see that there were signs of the queen and that there was larva in the frames and the eggs," Kaplan said. The queen can be hard to spot sometimes."

RIGHT Kaplan puts on one of her three bee suits. She bought them online and from beekeepers.com, which is located in Lenexa, Kansas.

BOTTOM RIGHT • Kaplan uses the hive tool to push apart the frames to check for the queen.



ABOVE • Three of Kaplan's bee suits hang in her closet. "Sometimes the bees slip in a little space in the hood near the zipper," Kaplan said. "I've gotten them in by my ankles inside my boots and caught in my hood before."

LEFT • Kaplan scrapes the honey and wax off of the frame into a bowl. She has been saving up the wax for five years to create a candle.



MARCH 28, 2022

design by peyton moore
photos by elise madden