

## FAQs – Bees in Burlingame

Bee Legal Task Force, Beekeepers' Guild of San Mateo County

### Importance and benefits of bees

1. **Why is it beneficial to have beekeepers in our community?** Beekeepers offer many benefits to Burlingame including: pollinating our plants for human and animal food; local honey for its deliciousness and for pollen allergies; educating adults and children about bees thereby reducing fear and promoting pollinator survival; working to increase honey bee survival by breeding resistant stock and managing for reduced disease; participating in national/ local research projects; collecting swarms and extractions of feral colonies from buildings and trees; and first defense to eliminate aggressive feral hives.
2. **Why keep bees in an urban-suburban city like Burlingame?** Burlingame provides a great habitat for bees: diverse plants flower year-round in our irrigated landscape. In contrast, monoculture agricultural landscapes only have seasonal nutrition for bees, which must be rented and shipped in for pollination. Bees produce a remarkable amount of nutritious local food because they pollinate our backyard fruits and vegetables and the wild fruits that feed wild animals and birds.
3. **Why do people in the Burlingame want to eat “local honey” – isn’t all honey the same?** Honey flavors vary, but most large producers heat, filter, and/or dilute honey to give it a consistent appearance. This can remove the distinctive characteristics of a local honey and the nutritious components (pollen, propolis, flavonoids). Honey lovers swear by the complex tastes of unfiltered local honey. Additionally, many deliberately consume local honey for its small doses of local pollen to ease their pollen allergy symptoms. Eating local honey also supports the local economy.
4. **What impact do bees have on our local economy?** Bees pollinate a third of our food and are key to local food production. Local nurseries sell plants that bees love. Local beekeepers sell honey and wax at our farmers’ markets. Chefs use local honey in their menus, especially when they are able to keep their own hives.
5. **Are all bees under threat and what can we do about this problem in Burlingame?** Honey bee and native bee populations have been decreasing due to habitat loss, pesticides, mites, disease, lack of forage, and drought. Survey data collected over the last decade show that honey bees have faced hive die-off rates of 30–40% each year. Amending the Burlingame beekeeping ordinance will make it less burdensome for Burlingame residents to keep bees and contribute to improving survival of the bee population.

### Community concerns about bees and bee behavior issues

1. **Won’t I have a lot of bees in my yard if my neighbor keeps bees?** Bees (both kept in hives and living in feral colonies) abound in our local environment. Because bees range up to 5 miles to forage, it's unlikely that you will see an increase in bees in your yard if your neighbor keeps a hive — if you grow pollinator-attractive plants, local bees will find them!
2. **I’m afraid of bees and don’t want to live near them!** It's natural to be afraid of bee, hornet, and wasp stings, but the likelihood of getting stung is quite low — especially for being stung by

honey bees, due to their docile nature (see next question, too). Many people overcome their fear when they learn about and encounter bees. Beekeepers report that children quickly move from trepidation to curiosity when they learn more about bees.

3. **Aren't bees inherently dangerous?** No. Beekeepers have bred honey bees for docility for centuries, and most bees are gentle if not threatened. Stinging is a last resort if their hive is disrupted.
4. **Bees are a nuisance when we picnic and I'm afraid of being stung!** Yellow jacket wasps give honey bees a bad name! Honey bees only forage for pollen and nectar on flowers – but yellow jackets love meat and other foods and are far more likely to annoy or sting picnickers. They are often mistaken for bees due to their yellow and black stripes. Yellow jackets usually nest in the ground and very aggressively defend their homes. Yellow jackets can bite/ sting many times, whereas honey bees die when they sting. County Vector Control provides a free service to eradicate yellow jacket nests if they are a nuisance on your property. Traps can also be used to keep yellow jackets away from your picnic.
5. **I'm afraid of / allergic to bees! How can I avoid them?** To avoid attracting bees to your property, avoid planting flowers attractive to bees. Under the proposed regulations, beekeepers would be required to control the hive flyway (the path the bees take when exiting the beehive) to avoid creating a nuisance. A fence or other barrier — open or solid – placed in front of the hive entrance forces bees to immediately fly upwards, above the height where they would interact with humans. Flyway barriers can be installed in other locations, too, if needed to direct the path the bees take.
6. **I think I have a bee sting allergy – how do I know?** Localized inflammation, itching, and redness are common reactions to stings/bites from bees, wasps, yellow jackets, ants, and other insects. This is a normal non-allergic reaction. In fact, life-threatening systemic reactions (called anaphylaxis) to bee stings are extremely rare, and occur in less than 0.6% of the population! The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology – Insect Sting Allergy is a good resource to learn more.
7. **Are people with bee allergies at greater risk when bees are being kept in their neighborhoods?** No. There are many ways contact can be avoided to reduce risk. Both feral and managed honeybees will feed on flowers within a 5-mile radius of their hive, so if you're allergic it's best avoid planting bee-attractive plants. It's also important to note that honey bees are relatively docile insects and rarely sting, typically only when they feel threatened or if defending their hive. A foraging bee is far from its hive, and therefore very unlikely to sting if not provoked (for example, by swatting at it).
8. **Sometimes I see honey bees drinking from water sources outside – why do they do that?** Bees need water for physiological reasons, and for cooling their hive. The proposed regulations call for beekeepers to provide a permanent source of water for their hives. Feral bees are also attracted to water sources and may visit water sources on neighbor properties even when beekeeper hives are using water provided by the beekeeper.
9. **Why do bees swarm and what can be done about it?** Bees swarm to reproduce, leaving their original colony in search of a good nest site. Swarming bees are very gentle because they have no honey stores or babies to protect. During their search, they might land at a resting place for a few days, sending out scouts to choose a new home. Beekeepers actively manage their

colonies to reduce swarming. The Beekeepers' Guild also maintains a list of experienced beekeepers who offer free swarm collecting services. Swarm Removal

10. **Do we have Africanized honey bees in Burlingame?** Africanized Honey Bees are a more aggressive strain of honey bee that has established along our southern border and been sporadically spotted northward in warmer eastern areas south from Sacramento. There are no reports of Africanized bees established in coastal northern California, including the Bay Area, where winters are cool and they are not likely to survive.
11. **Shouldn't hives be registered for public safety?** Under the California Food & Agricultural Code (Sections 29000 *et seq*), the County Agricultural Commissioner may require registration of 10 or more hives to monitor the spread of disease. According to the police and dispatchers we have spoken with, registering hives does not improve public safety because there is not sufficient time to communicate their location in a search.
12. **Could people keep bees in rental properties and condos in Burlingame under the proposed new regulations?** Yes, if they comply with their lease terms, or Homeowners Association (HOA) rules and CC&Rs. In both cases, their HOA or lease would likely have regulations that would come into play before the city regulations.
13. **What can be done if I have concerns about my neighbor's bee hives?** First, please talk to your neighbor and tell them how the bees are affecting you. Your beekeeping neighbor should be able to modify the situation if there is a nuisance and make sure you can comfortably use your property. Second, the Beekeepers' Guild has trained evaluators who can provide guidance on specific management changes to offer workable solutions that directly respond to your concerns. Guild evaluators have effectively resolved complaints in the County (note: beekeeping-related complaints in San Mateo County have been very rare, typically one every 2-3 years). They are on call for free to the City of Burlingame Code Enforcement staff as a first response to a complaint.