



Hive Tools

Practical Fact Sheet

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Please note: This series of MBKA Fact Sheets are intended to accompany practical sessions and demonstrations at members' apiaries during the season.

Of course, there is no "right way" to keep bees and most objectives can be achieved in several different ways. The advice presented in these notes is therefore selective, representing the method or methods used commonly and generally accepted as "best practice".

They should be regarded as guidance notes. It is expected that revisions will be frequent in the early phase of their production!

This fact-sheet covers the selection and use of Hive Tools

A hive tool is an indispensable piece of a beekeeper's equipment, used for several purposes during colony management

- levering off crown boards and separating boxes that the bees have stuck together
- removing and manipulating frames
- scraping propolis off wooden parts
- levering frames back together prior to closing up, etc, etc

There are two main types of hive tool, the flat, J-type and the hooked, scraper type; both are useful in certain circumstances but you are likely to use one much more than the other – personal preference.

The hive tool should be strong and have a reasonably sharp blade, such that it can be inserted between stuck-together boxes and not bend when leverage is applied.

Various techniques are used to extract frames but care should be exercised before applying too much effort to frame ends with J-type tools – they are quite likely to snap! Instead, use the tool to separate the frames horizontally, breaking any propolis bonds. Once just a little room has been made either side of a frame, it should lift out without damage. The use of a dummy board creates more working space and makes frame removal far easier.

The scraper-type hive tool may be your preferred tool if you use castellations in your hives, these tools make it easier to lift frames where the castellations interfere with J-types.

Whichever tool or tools you use, there are a couple of golden rules

1. keep the tool in your hand all the time (practice not putting it down!!)
2. make huge efforts to use the tool smoothly, slowly but deliberately
3. keep the tool clean (stainless steel is easiest)

Try to get into good habits – don't keep putting the tool down, don't jar the frames and bees by sudden movements. Put the tool close to the parts you wish to separate and s-m-o-o-t-h-l-y lever them apart; apply back-pressure with the other hand if necessary to avoid frames ping-pong apart.

Cleaning: stainless hive tools may be cleaned and stored in a bucket containing strong washing soda solution (1 kg soda to 5 litres hot water, plus a squeeze of washing-up liquid) A green scourer pad is useful to dislodge propolis etc.