

THE
LITTLE BOOK
OF
COTTAGECORE
TRADITIONAL SKILLS FOR
A SIMPLER LIFE

EMILY KENT

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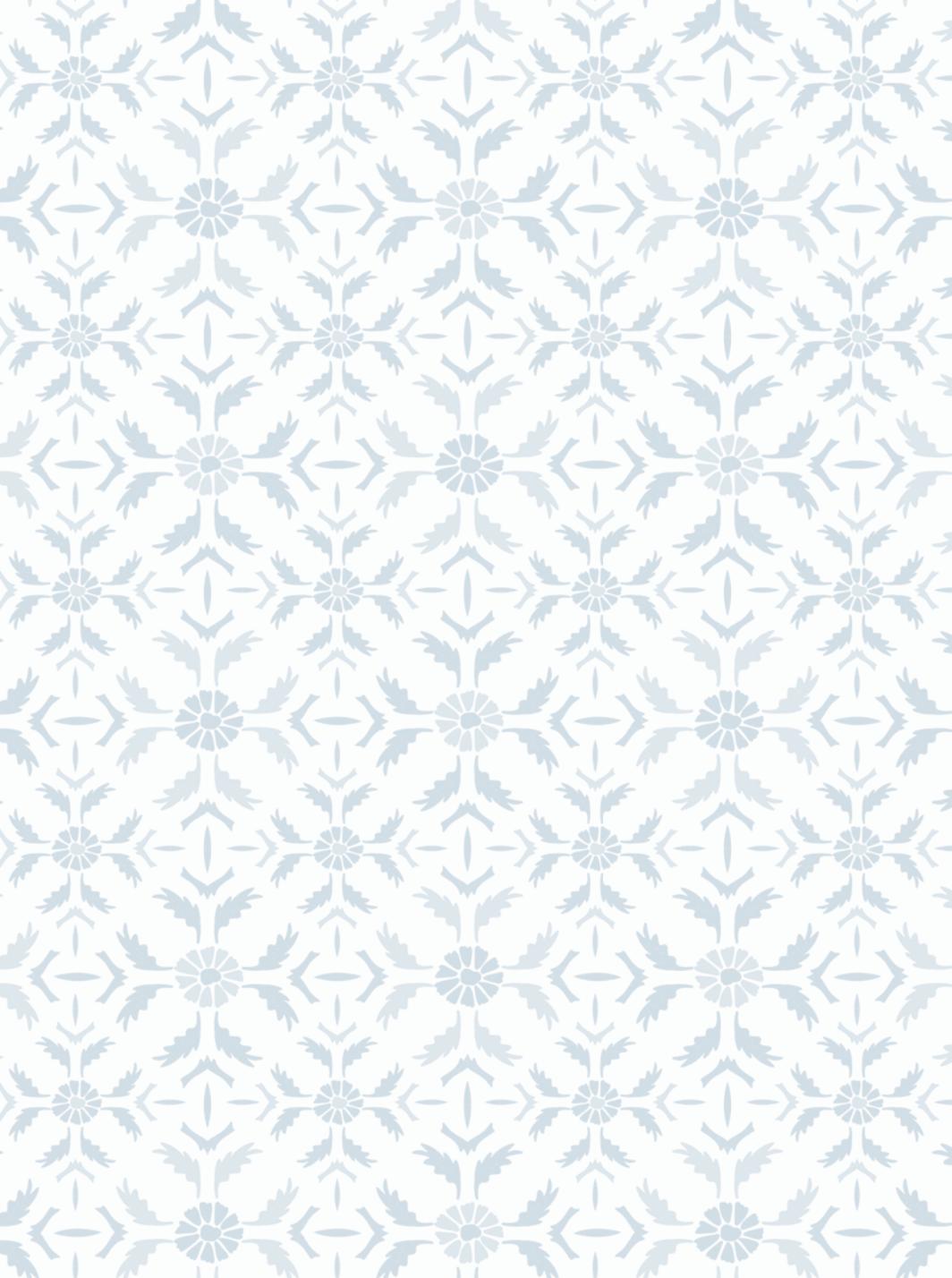
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*Going to your garden to pick your own fruits and vegetables.
Filling your kitchen with the aroma of freshly baked bread.
Curling up under a quilt you crafted yourself.*

If you've ever yearned for an idyllic life in the country, then cottagecore is for you.

Cottagecore is a movement centered around the simple existence of pastoral life. It focuses on unplugging from the stresses of modern life and instead embracing the wholesomeness and authenticity of nature. It's about experiencing the wistful and the whimsical, doing things that make you feel happy, and living a life of calm relaxation instead of an anxiety-ridden one.

The Little Book of Cottagecore will help you make this tranquil way of living a reality regardless of where you live. From container gardening and baking breads from scratch to sewing and cross-stitching and making your own candles and soap, this book is filled with fun hands-on activities that help you unplug from modern life and find solace in the simple things.



Inside you'll find ideas on:

- The easiest plants and herbs for container gardening
- How to bake picture-perfect breads and pies—and the recipes to help!
- Brewing an impeccable cup of tea
- Making your own simple herbal remedies for a variety of ailments
- Crafting unique candles for yourself (or as homemade gifts for others!)
- The ins and outs of making curtains and quilts for your home
- Safely making your own soap

Filled with step-by-step instructions and recipes, this accessible guide will lead you through all the ways you can get back to basics, find calm and comfort, and start living simply and joyfully.





CHAPTER 1

GARDENING
AND BEEKEEPING



Cottagecore is all about nature and there is no better way to experience the wonders of nature than by growing your own fruits and vegetables. Whether you have a garden of your own, space in a community garden, or space on your patio or balcony, anyone can experience the joys of gardening. This chapter will take you through the best ways to garden in containers and small spaces, but the material can also translate to people who are lucky enough to have a large patch of earth to use as a garden. No matter where you live, you can experience the joys of planting and harvesting your own crops. In addition, this chapter will go over some basic beekeeping skills. Though it is a labor-intensive hobby, there is something so rewarding about gathering your own pure, natural honey for use in both cooking and crafting.

Container Gardening

If you live in an urban area and the only outdoor space you have is a balcony or porch, growing your vegetables in containers is a great solution. When space is tight, it's best to concentrate on growing small quantities of several different crops and choosing smaller or dwarf varieties of larger plants. Planting in pots is probably the easiest and most common way to grow food on a balcony or patio.

When planning your space, looking at how much sun the area gets is the first step. Most vegetables, herbs, and fruit or berry bushes need at least 6 hours of sunlight each day, so take the time to check this out. If you get less than 6 hours, there are fewer options, but you can still grow many of the vegetables listed in this chapter, such as lettuce or Swiss chard. You should also consider what is the proper-sized container in which to grow your plants. You want to give your plants enough space so they can grow to maturity. Most herb and vegetable plants need a pot with a depth of at least 1 foot of soil to grow their best.

FINDING CONTAINERS

Containers can be purchased at your local nursery or hardware store. The most common kinds are traditional oak barrels, pots made from reconstituted paper, terra cotta, ceramic, wood, plastic, and resin. If you're planning to grow your vegetables in a container for several years, choose a good-quality one that will last. Containers need to be cleaned on a regular basis to keep

them looking good as well as pest- and disease-free, so choose a container you can take care of easily.

To save money, you can recycle items that are no longer fulfilling their original purpose. For example, if growing lettuce, small containers such as milk cartons, a bucket, or an old cooking pot are all wonderful options. When you purchase garden pots, there are usually holes in the bottom of them already. If you're recycling a container, make sure you create at least one good drainage hole so excess water can drain easily.

If you want to grow root crops (such as potatoes and carrots) or beans and peas, you'll need a larger container. Some good choices include Styrofoam coolers, wooden crates, plastic crates (which may need a liner such as landscape fabric in order to hold the soil), and plastic ice cream buckets (ask your local ice cream parlor for their empties). Garbage cans, wooden barrels, metal washbasins, old wheelbarrows that have become rusty and full of holes, or plastic clothes hampers are great options for planting larger crops such as tomatoes, potatoes, and squash.

PLANTING IN A CONTAINER

Here are eight easy steps for planting in your containers.

1. Select an appropriate-sized container for the plants you are growing that has drainage holes.
2. Fill the container with potting soil to within an inch of the top of the container.
3. Moisten the soil and let it absorb the water before planting (lukewarm water will be absorbed faster than cold water).

- 
4. You can grow several plants in the same pot (except very large ones like tomatoes or squash) and they can be crowded in a bit (about ten small plants will fit in an 18" pot).
 5. Set taller plants in the center of the pot and insert stakes prior to planting any other plants around the larger one. If you'll be trellising plants, the larger ones can be placed at the back of the container so they'll climb on the trellis and others can be planted in front.
 6. Water once the plants are in the soil; this will help settle the soil and get the roots established quickly.
 7. Add more soil, if needed, after watering.
 8. Keep the soil moist and well fertilized.

What Grows Well in a Container

The following are suitable vegetables to grow in containers:

- Beans
- Beets
- Broccoli
- Carrots
- Cucumbers
- Lettuce
- Peas
- Peppers
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Tomatoes

To grow lettuce, spinach, salad greens, radishes, and green onions, you need a container approximately 8"-10" wide and at

least 6" deep. In this size container you could grow two or three of your leafy greens and up to a dozen radishes or green onions. For growing carrots, beets, peas, and beans—just remember peas and beans will produce a better harvest if they're grown on a trellis or supported in some way—the best container size is approximately 12"-16" wide and at least 10" deep. If you choose a rectangular container, you could make great use of the space by growing your peas and beans in the back and planting your root crops in front.

Larger vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, broccoli, peppers, potatoes, and dwarf corn need a container at least 16" wide with at least 18" of soil to grow well. For best results, use transplants when growing these vegetables (except for potatoes and corn) and grow only one of these plants in each container. To fill up the pot and make it look more attractive, plant lettuce or herbs around the base of the larger plant.



If you want to grow a lot of vegetables on your balcony or patio, emphasize your vertical space by using trellises or fences. Grow vegetables that can be trained to grow upright, such as snow peas, shelling peas, pole beans, cucumbers, and tomatoes. Choose attractive materials like bamboo, metal, or wood to make trellises or stakes for your plants.



There are also fruits that do well in containers:

- Blueberries
- Raspberries
- Kumquats
- Lemons
- Dwarf varieties of other fruit trees (must be grown in large pots in the summer and brought indoors or sheltered when the weather gets cold)

Don't solely use potting soil for your fruit trees and shrubs since there is not enough organic matter in it for the plants' needs. Compost is best, or a mix of compost and topsoil. For peaches, nectarines, apricots, and cherries, reduce the topsoil by one quarter and add sand. Once the tree is planted, mulch the top of the container with wood chips to help conserve moisture. Give potted fruit trees and shrubs a thorough watering whenever the top inch of soil feels dry. A little fertilizer (an inch or so of compost or fish fertilizer) should be applied every spring when blossoms start to form. Most fruit trees or shrubs grown in containers will need to be brought indoors or at least protected from the colder winter weather.

Window Boxes

Even without a balcony or patio to set some pots on, most people have a sunny windowsill that may work just as well. The

best option is to hang the box outside a window that opens; the plants will get more natural light and you can easily reach it to water and fertilize the plants.

Most window boxes are approximately 2'-3' in length and 6"-8" deep, although there are many different sizes to choose from. If you don't have a sturdy window ledge to support the box, a light-weight option is probably best. There are some great hooks and hangers for supporting a window box over a balcony railing or on a windowsill. A window box isn't usually very large, so options are more limited, but you can still grow some of your own food.

Some plants that grow well in a window box that doesn't get a lot of heat include:

- Lettuce
- Swiss chard
- Spinach

If your window box gets a great deal of sun, these plants would be a better option:

- Parsley
- Chives
- Basil
- Peas
- Beans (if they can be trellised in some way)

When planting your window box, choose plants that will work best for your location. If the area isn't too hot, lettuce or spinach will grow in a shallow window box. However, if the area

gets a lot of heat, some annual herbs such as basil, parsley, and chives could be a better option for you.



Containers, bagged gardens, and window boxes will need watering every day, especially if the area gets full sun, so check your planters regularly. Have a hose stored under your sink so you have easy access for watering your balcony or patio garden.

Many herbs can be grown indoors in pots during the winter months. Place them in proper-sized containers and position them near a sunny window so you can enjoy using them all winter long. Grow perennials such as marjoram, chives, mint, and winter savory from divisions or cuttings taken in the fall. Basil, dill, and parsley are annuals and will need to be started from seed outdoors (in pots) in late summer then transplanted to larger pots in the fall. When growing herbs indoors, make sure you use a light, well-draining potting soil and water as needed. Try not to overwater the plants or let them dry out.

Bagged Garden

Another option is growing your herbs and vegetables in a bagged garden. You can get a shallow plastic container and place the bag of potting mix or a burlap sack into it. Make sure

you poke a few drainage holes in the bag, then turn it over and cut a flap in the top of the bag to expose the soil for planting. The plastic container will hold moisture as well as keep the area clean—it will act the same as a tray under a container—just make sure there’s no water sitting in the plastic container since most plants don’t like their roots to be too wet as they can start to rot.

A bagged garden is an excellent option for growing:

- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Carrots
- Beets
- Cabbage

Fruit Growing Basics

Most fruits are put into two categories: small fruits and tree fruits. Among the small fruits are strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, currants, blackberries, and gooseberries. Small fruits usually grow on either bushes or canes, except for strawberries which are a low-growing bedding plant.

Bushes have permanent spreading branches that grow to about 4' high and just as wide. Blueberries and currants grow on bushes. If you have a small space, these can be trained to grow as espalier along a fence or wall.

Canes are slender shrubs that have stems starting at ground level. They need to be controlled by being trained along a stake and wire or string and they need to be cut back each year after



fruiting so there's room for new growth. Raspberries and blackberries grow on canes.

POLLINATION

Most flowers need to be pollinated to develop into fruit. Pollen is usually transferred from one plant to another by the wind or insects. Small fruits, except for blueberries, can be fertilized by their own plant.

BERRY PATCH

Berries are easy to grow so long as they get enough sunlight and moisture. To ensure a good crop, separate the older fruit-bearing canes from the new by tying the new growth together or tagging it so you can easily identify what's old and new. Once the fruit has finished on the older stalks they can be cut back. This provides room for new growth and allows light to reach it.

Berries such as blueberries or blackberries can be grown successfully against a wall or fence to maximize your small space.

Blackberries

Blackberries can be grown either erect or trailing.

- **Botanical name:** *Rubus fruticosus*
- **Family name:** Rosaceae
- **Growing characteristics:** Best grown in a sunny location but will take partial shade.
- **Soil:** Well-drained soil with a pH of about 5.5 is best.

- **Water and fertilizer:** Require adequate moisture all season. A month or so before new growth starts in the spring, apply 10-10-10 fertilizer (½ pound per 10' row).
- **When to plant:** Canes are best planted in early fall. If the ground doesn't freeze plant them up until early spring.
- **Care:** Disease and insects are kept at bay by planting your bush in an area that's been cultivated for several years. Choose disease-resistant varieties. Remove old canes after harvest and keep plants free of weeds and fallen leaves.
- **Harvest:** Berries start producing in August.

Blueberries

Check with your local nursery for the best varieties to grow in your area.

- **Botanical name:** *Vaccinium corymbosum*
- **Family name:** Ericaceae
- **Growing characteristics:** Blueberries do best in a sunny location but will grow in partial shade.
- **Soil:** They need an acidic soil with a pH of 5.0-6.0; if you have an alkaline soil, plant your blueberries in pots. Blueberries are not completely self-fertile, so plant two varieties together to ensure good pollination.
- **Water and fertilizer:** Like water-retentive soil. In the spring, apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer (½-1 ounce per square yard). If you have sandy soil, do a second application a month later.
- **When to plant:** Plant in the fall or spring 3'-4' apart.

- **Care:** In northern climates, bushes should be protected from the cold winds. In summer, mulch your plants with well-rotted manure, compost, or peat. You may need to use netting to protect your bushes from birds.
- **Harvest:** June or July.

Currants and Gooseberries

Currants and gooseberries can be grown in most areas. Red currants do best in cooler, humid regions. Black currants are not as popular.

- **Botanical name:** *Ribes*
- **Family name:** Rosaceae
- **Growing characteristics:** Currants and gooseberries grow on a bush. They grow well in either a sunny location or in partial shade. They flower early in the year, so choose an area that will be less likely to get a heavy frost.
- **Soil:** They like water-retaining but well-drained soil.
- **Water and fertilizer:** Water only during prolonged dry spells and fertilize in late winter or early spring. Use a complete fertilizer and place around the base of the bush.
- **When to plant:** Plant in early spring or in the fall.
- **Care:** Take out any suckers that grow from the main stem or the roots. Control weeds by mulching. Birds are a common problem and placing netting over your bushes will help.
- **Harvest:** Pick when fully ripe.

Raspberries

The best way to grow raspberries is in a row with the canes trained between stakes and wires.

- **Botanical name:** *Rubus idaeus*
- **Family name:** Rosaceae
- **Growing characteristics:** Raspberries generally do best in full sun but can be grown in partial shade.
- **Soil:** They like a soil that is slightly acidic and well drained but with moisture retention. Raspberries don't do well on slopes, especially if the soil drains quickly. Try placing them where they'll have some protection from wind or cold. Canes that have produced fruit die and are replaced every year by new canes that grow from the roots.
- **Water and fertilizer:** Water well in warm or dry spells. Mulch with manure, compost, or peat to help retain moisture. Apply horse manure in the fall and fertilize approximately one month before growth starts in the spring.
- **When to plant:** Plant one-year-old canes in the fall.
- **Care:** Keep well weeded; hand weeding is best as hoeing between the canes can damage the shallow root system. Canes need to be supported and you can do this by placing posts at either end of your row and stringing wire between them on either side of the canes.
- **Harvest:** Some varieties bear fruit midsummer on the previous season's shoots; others fruit in early or mid-fall on the current growth.

Strawberries

There are two different kinds of strawberries. One produces only one crop of fruit and the other is an ever-bearing kind that produces one crop in early summer and another in mid-fall. Ever-bearing strawberries are usually less hardy and don't store fresh for long.

- **Botanical name:** *Fragaria*
- **Family name:** Rosaceae
- **Growing characteristics:** Strawberries like sunny locations.
- **Soil:** They like fertile, well-drained soil that is slightly acidic with a pH of 5.5-6. The soil should have enough organic matter that it will retain moisture.
- **Water and fertilizer:** Water regularly in dry weather, especially when ripening begins, and during the first few weeks after planting new plants. Apply a complete fertilizer in late winter.
- **When to plant:** Plant in either spring or fall. Ever-bearing varieties are best planted in the spring.
- **Care:** In the first season, remove the blooms from one-crop varieties that were planted in the fall or spring. On ever-bearing varieties, remove flowers in early spring to encourage more and better berries later in the season. Runners will freely grow once the plants are actively growing and these can be cut off to make sure more energy goes to producing more fruit. A three-year cycle is the usual method for strawberries. Young plants are set out in the spring for harvesting the next summer. The next year,

these plants will produce less and should be removed right after fruiting. To get a bumper crop of strawberries, you want to set out new plants each year. Once berries start to form, tuck dry straw under the berries to keep them from touching the ground (this makes them less susceptible to rotting). In the fall, cut off any runners that have grown (this conserves the plant's energy). Control weeds with shallow hoeing.

- **Harvest:** To ensure good flavor, pick strawberries with their stems attached when the berries are fully ripened all around. They bruise easily so avoid excessive handling.

Growing Herbs

In almost every culture in history, there are references to using herbs for preparing and preserving food, scenting the air, and treating illnesses and wounds. Most herbs are wild, tough plants that haven't changed despite being cultivated for centuries.

When planning your herb garden, first decide where you'd like to locate the plants. If you're keeping your herbs outside, consider growing them near the back or front door so the plants will be easily accessible from the kitchen.

When harvesting herbs, be sure to pick them early in the morning. The best time is just after the dew has dried but before the sun has hit the leaves. The reason for this is the essential oils found in the herb leaves lose their quality of flavor and fragrance once the leaves are exposed to heat.



When harvesting perennial herbs such as thyme, mint, and lavender, it's important not to harvest too much of the plant in the first year of growth; if the plant is cut back too much, the root system will not be able to develop properly. A light trim will help shape the plant and encourage bushiness. Once the plant has become established, you can harvest up to two-thirds of the plant each season.

Most annual and biennial plants can be cut several times over the season, and a good rule of thumb is to cut the top half of the plant at each cutting. Just before the first frost, either pull the plant or cut it at ground level. The same is true when harvesting biennials such as parsley. If you're growing to save herb seeds, find a way to mark the plant early in the season and don't cut it so it will produce a large amount of seeds. If you're growing the plant in a container, write a note on the pot. If you're planting it in the ground, perhaps place it on the edge of your herb garden. Anything to remind you you're treating that plant differently from the others will do the trick. Biennials will not produce seeds until the second year.

Beekeeping: A Short Introduction

Bees are an essential part of agriculture, necessary for pollinating plants to ensure better fruits and bigger crops. In this section, you will learn the basics of beekeeping, but know that this is an intense process for only the most dedicated of people.

Before beginning this hobby, make sure you have a thorough understanding of the complexities of keeping bees.

Honeybees can be kept almost anyplace that has flowering plants producing nectar and pollen. Choose a site for beehives that is discreet, sheltered from winds, and partially shaded. Avoid low spots in a yard where cold, damp air accumulates in winter.

THE HIVE LOCATION

The best beehive location is one where your best source of pollen and nectar is within two square miles of your hive—the closer the better. Because bees use pollen and nectar to produce their own energy, the farther they have to travel for it, the more they have to consume themselves. In contrast, if you place them closer to their food source, you can collect more honey.



Before you begin beekeeping, know that most states have very strict laws as to where hives can be placed and who can keep them. You need to understand the laws of your state before you begin.

Position your hive so the entrance faces east, this way the early morning sun will alert them to the new day. Because flower nectar often evaporates in the morning hours during the summer, the sooner bees are out of their hive foraging, the more honey they are likely to produce. The best position for a hive is where it will also have afternoon shade, shielding the hive from



the summer sun. Shade, rather than sunlight, will give the bees more time to concentrate their efforts on making honey since they won't need to work on carrying water back to cool the hive.

BASIC BEEKEEPING EQUIPMENT

A man-made hive is built to imitate the spaces bees leave between their honeycombs in nature. The dimensions are fairly standard and should be copied exactly if you decide to make your own beehives.

The following equipment is used within a hive:

- **Bottom board:** a wooden stand that the hive rests upon. Bottom boards can be set on bricks, concrete blocks, cinder blocks, or any stable base to keep the hive off the ground.
- **Hive body or brood super:** a large wooden box that holds eight to ten frames of comb. In this space, the bees rear their brood and store honey for their own use. Up to three brood supers can be used for a brood nest.
- **Queen excluder:** a frame made with wire mesh placed between the brood super and the honey super.
- **Honey supers:** shallow boxes with frames of comb hanging in them for bees to store surplus honey.
- **Frames and foundation:** frames hang inside each super or box on a specially cut ledge, called a rabbet. Frames keep the combs organized inside your hive and allow you to easily and safely inspect your bees.
- **Covers:** you'll need an inner and outer cover.

- **Smoker:** this calms bees and reduces stinging; pine straw, sawdust, chipped wood mulch, grass, and burlap make good smoker fuel.
- **Hive tool:** used for prying apart supers and frames.
- **Bee suit or jacket, veil, gloves, ankle protection, and gauntlet:** this is all personal protective gear worn when working with bees.
- **Feeders:** these hold sugar syrup that is fed to the bees in early spring and in fall.

PURCHASING BEES

Usually the best way to start keeping bees is to buy established colonies from a local beekeeper. Often a local beekeeper might even have a colony he or she wants to give away. It's better to get two colonies at the beginning because that allows you to interchange frames of both brood and honey if one colony becomes weaker than the other and needs a boost. Have the beekeeper open the supers. The bees should be calm and numerous enough that they fill most of the spaces between combs.

Moving a hive is a two-person job and it's easiest to move a hive during winter when they're lighter and populations are low. The first thing to do is close the hive entrance (you can accomplish this with a piece of folded window screen), then look for any cracks and seal them with duct tape. Make sure the supers are fastened together and the bottom board is stapled to the last super. Remember to open the hive entrance after the hive is relocated.