

conversion

Change is difficult, but after study and reflection, once the choice is made - at the moment of decision - it all seems obvious. A leap of faith and one is converted. After that, from the outside, nothing looks very different. The transformation is in the inner being ... born again ... nothing is the same. Some trepidation, to be sure ... new wine in old wineskins – some danger there. I'm referring, of course, to the conversion of Langstroth hives to Kenyan / Tanzanian top-bar hives ... and, as it turns out, a modification using existing woodware is straightforward and easy, whether the move is tentative (with only one or a few hives being converted) or, as is happening in Apiopolis this spring, a full leap into the unknown.



There's an old beekeeper's adage: *"People get into beekeeping because of the bees and get out of beekeeping because of the honey."* Honey production can be hot, heavy, sticky work. Professional beekeepers, to be sure, place high value on efficient production and maximizing honey volume yield. While providing pollination services to the agricultural industry is now the mainline cash business of modern beekeeping, honey production and sales are still part of the mix for many commercial apiaries. The hobbyist / backyard beekeeper has other motivations, however. Only a small segment of the amateur beekeeping community is in it for financial profit from honey sales.



The amateur beekeeper is typically instructed in methods designed to maximize honey yield per hive and to mechanize collection of the honey produced. Use of an extractor to spin honey out of the comb cells appeals to minimization of "wasted effort" by the bees. Re-use of spun-out honeycomb allows the colony to refill emptied wax cells with gathered nectar to convert to more honey. On the other hand, harvesting honey by the cut/crush/strain method (see [harvest](#) webpage) is simple and straightforward, though bees must then rebuild fresh wax comb. However, each filled frame of honeycomb yields about a quart of honey. A full eight-frame Langstroth super gives 2 gallons. Multiply that by a few hives and a couple of supers per season ... lots of honey for the amateur beekeeper. The question arises: how much annual honey production do you want to fill your needs?



Once the decision is made to forego centrifugal extraction of honey from the comb, with its requirement of wooden frames and wire-reinforced wax foundation, it's an easy step to rethink the need for wooden frames at all. Why not simply provide a minimal template to keep the combs in parallel order, a bit of wax foundation attached to a wooden top-bar ... and let the bees do the rest? That is the basic philosophy of the top-bar hive, whether Kenyan style (sloping walls) or Tanzanian style (vertical walls).



There's another angle to the conversion, possible if a simple hive modification is made, allowing one to observe the delicate beauty occurring inside the dark world of the hive. Setting a removable panel / window in a top-bar hive box (simple enough to do - see [windows](#) webpage) allows observation of the coordinated work of the honeybee colony as it constructs its comb out of thin air, and fills the comb cells with multicolored pollen and with nectar. Standard hive inspection (smoking, lifting out comb, etc.) must still be done for maintenance, but the ability to view the colony conducting business as usual in a closed hive opens a new dimension in beekeeping.



Please understand that these are the opinions and observations of an eccentric amateur, whose top-bar hives have not yet produced their first drop of honey. To be sure, management and honey production from top-bar apiaries has been well established, with tried-and-true methods (see referenced links), but there is always uncertainty and doubt in any transition. What sustains the new convert in such times are faith and hope ... and, of course, something even greater than these.



For more images and references, go to [imagessays.com](https://www.imagessays.com) -> [conversion](#)