

Hive of activity

Give bees their sweetest life ever with a healthy and colourful home.

Bees are amazing little creatures – we simply couldn't live without them. The vast majority of food crops rely on pollination. Even before moving onto our farm, Carlos and I knew we wanted bees to help pollinate our crops, vegetable garden and orchard.

We welcomed 10 hives to our Arrowtown property last summer, and they have already provided us with several jars of nature's best sweetener. Our small army of overachievers has also done a superb job pollinating the fruit trees and crops, so it's fitting they rest over winter. We made sure to leave plenty of honey for them so they have lots to nibble on. It will last them for the next five months or so, then the weather will warm up, and they'll be able to collect nectar again.

Our apiarist, Blake, checks on our hives several times throughout the year. In autumn, we removed some boxes and empty frames to reduce the hives' size, which encourages the bees to huddle in a smaller space and therefore keep warmer. The 'winter cluster' is like a penguin huddle, with the outer layer acting as a blanket for the bees in the centre.

With the bees resting, winter is a good time to give those boxes a new lick of paint. Blake also recommends using this time to give the baseboard a clean. I decided to paint

some extra beehive boxes using Resene colours, inspired by the Otago landscape, that mimic the alpine-fresh sky and tawny tussock hills.

BEE IN THE KNOW

– Ever wondered why beehives are painted in a patchwork of colours? If beehives are identical, bees tend to drift to neighbouring hives. To prevent this, beekeepers often paint their hives in distinct colours.

– Bees see a higher colour spectrum than humans and can see ultraviolet rays, which allows them to orient themselves to where the sun is, even on a cloudy day. Bees can't see red – it appears as black – but they can see reddish wavelengths, such as orange.

– The hive entrance is the best place to differentiate with colour; the rest of the box can be painted for aesthetics. Shapes, such as koru or triangles, can also be painted near the entrance. "There's a lot we don't know about bees, but they are smart enough to identify their hive with colour and shapes, as well as their own navigation systems," says Blake.

TIPS FOR PAINTING A BEEHIVE

EXPOSURE Paint all surfaces that are exposed to sun and rain. The interiors (such as frames), entryways and the floor should not be painted.

PREP If left unprotected, the outer surface of a beehive box will begin to crack or warp more quickly than painted wood. Prepare a beehive by ensuring the wood is clean and dry before applying one coat of a high-quality primer such as Resene Quick Dry.

COLOUR In cooler climates, colours such as green or brown will absorb heat. For warmer temperatures, choose lighter colours, which reflect light. Paint two coats of a tough waterborne paint, such as Resene Lumbersider, to maximise durability against the elements.



I painted my beehives in classic Otago colours: Resene Moby for a mid-blue sky hue, Resene Flourish for a fresh pop of green and Resene Tussock to represent the picturesque golden hills that rule in my neck of the woods. I kept the metal lids bare but if you want to paint them, use a suitable primer like Resene GP Metal Primer before adding colour.



Resene

the paint the professionals use

