



Scattered along a gently sloping hill on our farm is a series of white wooden boxes that resemble fallen tiles from a game of giant dominos. The boxes arrived one spring six years ago in an old pickup truck driven by Ed Yoder, a longtime neighbor and beekeeper who sells his honey at local supermarkets. Always searching for open land in this county of dwindling farms, Ed approached my husband and me, asking whether we would mind having some hives on our property. Since we didn't, 20 of them—home to about a million bees—came to share our 135 acres. At least that's how we described it initially. In reality, we've come to understand, it is the bees who have consented to share their workspace with us, and we, clumsy and often inadvertently destructive humans, are the better for it.

Our coexistence did not get off to an auspicious start. Shortly after the bees moved in, I began, as I always do in spring, spending most of my free time in the vegetable

garden—tilling the raised beds, pulling early weeds and carrying out flats of plants started in the greenhouse some 50 feet away. The bees, I quickly learned, disapproved of my activity. They had claimed this formerly quiet area as their own. They had chosen well, packed as the garden was with nectar-dripping flowers and fruit trees in brilliant bloom, a veritable juice bar that they frequented from early to late.

Each of my trips into the garden brought an angry protest as dozens of them dive-bombed my head, just as barn swallows do to cats when their territory is encroached upon. I had always found that funny, but being the victim myself was eminently less amusing. I tried varying the hours that I gardened; I tried apologizing to the bees each time I walked in; I even tried singing to them—all to no avail. Whether I was early or late, contrite or in song, the bees were piqued to see me, a fact made clear by the number of welts on various parts of my body. After six stings, I'd had enough.