ALTERNATIVE ABODE:

Warre Hives

Aspiring beekeepers interested in more natural beekeeping methods may want to consider an alternative to the Langstroth hive, the conventional hive most often seen in fields and commercial apiaries. The Warre hive is one such option: It's simple and shares some similarities with its other hive cousin—the top bar hive. In fact, it's sometimes called the "vertical top bar hive."

The Warre hive—named after Emile Warré, who invented it in France in the early 20th century—is bottomless. Bees build their comb on bars in more natural shapes, rather than being forced to build into the conventional squares of the Langstroth hive.

Several boxes with bars are stacked vertically on top of one another, and the bees build their comb vertically. With the comb attached, the lightweight bars are simply lifted to harvest the bees' products. Some natural beekeepers feel this vertical orientation mimics natural behaviors and is healthy for the bees, including helping them stay warm in the winter. Also, Warre hives call for a more hands-off beekeeping method, which can be great for the hobby or newbie beekeeper. However, Warre and other top bar hives have been used successfully for income, as well. Warre users report that the quantity of honey is less than that of the Langstroth, but labor is also less intense, the quantity of beeswax is higher and the quality of the honey they harvest is greater. These may all be advantages to beekeepers who tend their own hives and want to make beeswax and premium honey-based products.

COURTESY NICK HAMPSHIRE

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The Warre hive is easy to build with simple materials, making it a great weekend project to help restore Honey bee numbers, boost crop yields, and start producing honey and beeswax.

For more information on the Warre hive, including free construction plans, visit www.microecofarming.com. —*Barbara Berst Adams*