

Life is a real buzz as a beekeeper



Brentan Doeven with the simple tools of the honey trade: a spinner and sieve.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A99E90;"] W
[/dropcap]hen it comes to making a living, Brentan Doeven has chosen a path with a real sting in the tail.

Brentan, a tall, 25-year-old with a shaved head, Greg-Combet-style glasses and a heavy gold chain around his neck looks more like the sort of guy who would be serving short blacks in an inner-Melbourne café, but instead he makes his money from honey.

He finds it difficult to explain what drew him to beekeeping exactly, other than he simply likes bees.

"I found them fascinating. They are such simple yet complex creatures," he said.

Brentan bought a single hive about four years ago and placed it on his parent's farm at East Naringal, where he still lives, and taught himself the finer details of beekeeping by reading books about it.

"There is a lot more to it than meets the eye, actually," he said.

"You have to learn how to check the boxes for diseases, how to keep the boxes in good condition and how bees operate."



Checking the hives, with the rolling hills of Naringal in the background.

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[/dropcap]rentan has since expanded to 30 hives and pretty much knows all there is to know about bees, from how they don't like getting caught in the rain, to how they choose their queen and which flowers produce the best honey.

In this, he has a distinct advantage, as his parents grow and sell cut flowers, so the property is awash with a huge variety of native plants and trees, plus numerous fruit trees that

have also proven irresistible to his charges.

“Come late spring and summer, when everything is in flower, it can get pretty crazy here,” he says.

Brentan has also taught himself how to extract and bottle honey, using techniques that involve as little human intervention as possible.

He bought a hand-cranked extraction machine – which looks like a metal garbage can – from an old farmer and uses this to spin the honey out of the honeycomb.

The honey is then filtered with a hand-sieve that is held together by four bits of cane.

And that’s it.

The rich golden honey tastes superb – not too sweet, not too overpowering.



Unmasked: Brentan with some of his freshly harvested honey.

Of course there are drawbacks to working with bees, and we had to ask the obvious question, to which Brenton replied: “Yes!”

“Yes, I have been stung. Several times.

“Once I didn’t zip my suit up properly and a bee got in, then another and another, because once a bee stings, it lets off a pheromone that sets all the other bees off. I had to jump in the dam to stop them.”

[box type="bio"] You can find Brentan (aka Brentan the Bee Man) at the Port Fairy Farmers’ Markets and Warrnambool Showground markets.[/box]

Thriving on flower power

Andy and Debbie Doeven live the kind of life that most people only fantasise about while staring out the window from their desk job. It has been more than 20 years since the pair decided to uproot from suburban Melbourne and start afresh ...