



WHICH BEES ARE BEST?

Western honeybees or European honeybees are from the genus *Apis Mellifera*. *Apis* is Latin for 'bee' and *mellifera* is Latin for 'honey-bearing'. But within the genus, there are several sub-species.

There are three subspecies commonly occurring in Australia:

- Carniolan (*Apis Mellifera Carnica*)
- Caucasian (*Apis Mellifera Caucasia*)
- Italian (*Apis Mellifera Ligustica*)

Each sub-species has specific genetic traits. You can find breeders who specialize in a specific sub-species, but beekeepers who raise their own queens and allow open mating actually end up with cross-bred bees with dominant traits of the sub-species their queens have mated with. For example, you may have a queen that is quite golden in colour, with docile offspring that are light golden with brown bands, but great propolis builders too – revealing the inbred genetics of Italians in the colouring and temperament and the propolis building genetics of the Caucasian.

Carniolans are generally dusky brown in colour with lighter brown stripes. Carnies are well suited to colder climates like the Adelaide Hills, as they start foraging at a lower temperature (around 10 degrees) and keep going late into Autumn. This means they build up quickly at the start of the season and if you are not aware that your bees are Carnies, you could be dealing with early swarming. So, be prepared to get into your hives earlier than the textbooks recommend. Carniolans have a lower tendency to rob other colonies and are calm and docile. They are sometimes called grey bees.

They tend to overwinter well and because they are more resistant to cold temperatures, they have reduced consumption of food stores over winter. Carniolans can adjust their worker population according to the availability of nectar and pollen. Carniolans do not use excessive amounts of propolis.



Caucasians typically have dark colouring and grey hairs. They also have the longest proboscis of all the honeybee species, so can reach deeper into flowers for nectar and makes them effective at pollinating tubular flowers.



They are known for their excessive propolis building.

Caucasians are very docile, making them a suitable option in suburban areas. However, because of their docility, they are prone to robbing from other hives and are susceptible to certain diseases.

They are prolific honey producers and are 'tidy' workers, preferring to completely fill one frame before moving to the next one. Due to their heavy propolis use, hive management can be problematic as they glue down frames and boxes.

They fare well in colder climates and do not keep large clusters over winter. They build up numbers slowly in spring.

Italians are docile and easy to work with but are the slowest to start their spring buildup and foraging, waiting for warmer temperatures, usually above 15 degrees.

They maintain large colonies and are known for their loose winter clustering. They are the bees most at risk of starvation in early spring, as they are most likely to have worked through all their winter stores before they start bringing in new forage.

Their numbers build a little later in spring compared to the Carnies and Caucasians, but they do catch up quickly once the weather is warm. Once they start building up their numbers, the colony expands quickly, so they are prone to swarm if the hive becomes congested.

They are a favourite amongst beginners due to their lovely temperament and being excellent foragers and honey producers. They are also very good housekeepers and highly disease resistant.

