

UNITING TWO COLONIES OF BEES

If you find yourself with a colony of bees that may not make it through the winter, why not consider uniting it with another colony. It is easy to do and below are some notes and general guidelines on how to do it.

Late summer or early fall is often the best time to do this.

Select the two colonies to be united

A weak colony is often united with a strong colony but can be united with another weak colony.

The weaker of the two colonies will be moved and placed above the stronger colony

Prepare the two colonies to be united

If possible, consolidate the weaker colony into one deep hive body. Include the 10 best frames, (brood, honey and bee bread).

Consolidate the weaker colony during the day time when the weather is good and the bees are flying.

By judging the quality of the brood patterns and the age of the queen, make a judgment of how good the queen is.

Clean off any burr comb from the bottom bars of this hive.

Use plenty of smoke during these manipulations

If the second and stronger colony is also weak you may want to consolidate it also into 10 frames. If the stronger colony has a lot more than 10 good frames, you may want to use both chambers (brood boxes) for under the weaker colony.

By judging the quality of the brood patterns and the age of the queen, make a judgment of how good that queen is.

Clean off any burr comb from the top of the frames of this hive.

From your previous observations determine which hive has the best queen and remove the other one.

It is best to do these reductions/ consolidations at least 24 hrs before uniting the two hives. The frames can be arranged in the same manner as the bees would expect them to be.

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Do this at the end of the day when most of the bees are done flying.

Remove the inner and outer covers from the stronger hive

Use plenty of smoke for this operation

Place a single sheet of newspaper on top of the frames on this bottom (stronger) hive. The paper will extend out past the hive body. If it is windy, tape or pin it fast if necessary.

Place several small slits in the newspaper with your hive tool or poke a few holes in the paper with the tip of a pencil.

If the weather is hot make the holes a little bit larger to allow some ventilation to keep the bees from getting too hot.

Note: there is no upper entrance for the top hive.

Now place the weaker hive body(super) on top of the newspaper. Again, use plenty of smoke.

Replace the inner and outer covers over the top of the united hive.

CHECKING THE COLONY

In several days the two colonies should be united. After a day or two the bees should be carrying the newspaper out of the hive and some of it may be visible in front of the hive.

In about a week you can open the hive and remove any residual newspaper. You may want to check for eggs.

If you have used two brood supers on the bottom and one the top you could reduce the united hive to only two supers if there is plenty of honey and bee bread available.

Go through the hive and arrange the frames so that those with the most honey are in the top hive body and those with the most brood and bee bread are in the bottom hive body. Fill out the two hive bodies with the best frames from what is left.

At this point it will benefit the hive to be given some 2:1 sugar syrup. using a feeder box on top of the hive or any other method you like. Consider feeding 2 gal, of syrup with Fumagilin. This will cure and prevent Nosema. Feed more syrup if the bees will take it.

You should now have a hive that has a very good chance of making it through the winter if all of the other winter preparation criteria have been met. It should have plenty of bees, honey and bee bread *and of course you have treated for mites.*

The more you do this the easier it gets and the better you get at doing it.