

SPLITTING BEEHIVES

Why split a colony

The terms dividing a colony, splitting a colony and making a "nuc" are all very similar processes. Splitting a colony is often done when a colony is very strong and the beekeeper wants to reduce the likelihood of a hive swarming, the beekeeper simply desires to increase the number of his colonies or he desires to make nucleus colonies. Splitting a colony usually results in a reduced honey production for that hive.

When to split a hive

Inspect the colony that is to be split and make note of the following: The colony should have a lot of healthy brood, the brood pattern should look good and there should be plenty of honey, pollen and bees. It is not a good idea to split a colony unless it is strong. If you split a colony that is not strong enough you may reduce the viability of that colony and the new colony may not be strong enough to survive.

SPLITTING PROCEDURE

CAUTION. Be sure not to transfer the queen over into the new colony. It may be best to locate the queen before you start the process and set her aside and the frame that she is on so she is not hurt. You may want to temporarily put the frame with the queen into a nuc box to keep her safe.

There are numerous methods of splitting hives. One method is to move selected frames from a parent hive to a new hive. Another approach is to move frames from a parent hive to start two new colonies. Caution is warranted to be sure that the parent colony is not overly weakened when removing too many frames.

The usual procedure is to place a new hive on a stand near the parent colony. The top and inner covers are removed and also the second upper deep hive body if it on the new hive. Any existing frames are removed from the new hive body and set aside. The new hive should now have a bottom board and an empty hive body and an entrance reducer.

Selected frames of honey, beebread and brood in various stages of development are used to start the new colony. These frames are transferred to the new hive body along with the bees that are on the frames to be transferred. These are generally the nurse bees and are needed to take care of the brood. The nurse bees will stay with the new colony and will not return to the parent hive. The strength of the parent colony helps determine how many frames can be safely transferred from it. To greatly improve the success of the new hive it is often desirable to shake extra nurse bees into the new hive. There is no set number of frames that should be transferred. This is a gray area where the beekeeper should use his best judgment or experience. The more frames that are transferred to the new hive the weaker the parent hive becomes and the stronger the new hive becomes. After transferring the desired frames to the new hive location the empty spaces in the new hive can be filled with frames of foundation or drawn comb. Drawn comb is always superior to foundation. If foundation is used it is desirable to feed the hive syrup until the foundation is drawn out into honeycomb.

If the beekeeper desires to make a nucleus colony he should transfer two frames of honey and three frames containing brood and bee bread with bees to cover. The frames of honey are placed along the sides of the new hive body.

When all the frames are transferred into the new colony a new queen should be introduced into the new colony. The proper introduction methods should be followed.

If the beekeeper decides not to introduce a new queen the hive will raise its own queen if there are eggs or very young larvae in the hive.

The new hive with its new queen should not be disturbed for several days.

After several days the beekeeper may want to open the hive and check to see if the queen has been released and is laying eggs. If she is still in the cage it is ok to release her.

The new colony can be moved to a new location or kept in the same apiary. Only foraging bees will return to the parent hive. The nurse bees will stay with the brood.

If foundation was used instead of drawn comb to be sure the hive has enough syrup to draw out the foundation.

Be cautious about splitting colonies in the late summer because the hive may not have time to secure sufficient honey to survive the winter.

If the new colony does not develop to a point that it will probably survive the winter it can be united with another colony.

The beekeeper should now have a strong parent hive and a well established new hive.