

CARING FOR HONEY BEES IN THE SPRINGTIME

The initial hive inspection

On a day that the bees are flying and the weather is relatively warm it should be safe to remove any insulation and felt paper that is on the hive. It is also OK to remove the tray under the screened bottom board if one has been installed and also any insulation boards that you may have on top of the inner cover.

If the temperature is above 60- degrees and there is very little or no wind it should be safe to remove the top and inner covers. You will most likely find many bees at the top of the hive.

When removing frames at this time of year you must take care to not allow the brood to get chilled.

Do not keep the frames of brood out of the hive for extended periods of time.

When removing frames be sure not to hurt the queen.

Do not start removing frames from the center of the super first. The queen may be on one of these frames so start with one of the outer frames.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR (when removing frames from the hive.)

- ✓ Where in the hive is the brood nest located?
If the bees are in two deep supers, the brood nest may be completely up into the top deep super by this time.
- ✓ Check the bottom super to determine if there is still brood in it. Bees start the winter in the bottom of the hive and over the course of the winter move up to the top.
- ✓ If the brood nest is completely into the top deep super it is sometimes advisable to **reverse the two chambers**, putting the bees back down on the bottom. Reversing the top and bottom hive bodies when there is still brood in the bottom deep will split the brood nest. This is not a good idea.
- ✓ Are there eggs and larvae which will prove that the queen is alive?
- ✓ Is the brood pattern solid, indicating that the queen is doing a good job?
- ✓ Determine if the brood nest area is crowded.
- ✓ Is there plenty of room for the queen to lay eggs?
- ✓ Is there empty drawn comb above and around the brood nest?
- ✓ Is there adequate honey and pollen (bee bread) in the hive to sustain it? The hive will not raise the desired amount of brood without sufficient honey and bee bread in reserve.
- ✓

Feeding the bees

If you have determined that there is not enough honey in the hive, considering both the top and bottom hive bodies, the hive should be fed sugar water in a 1:1 ratio by weight or volume. Cane sugar is best. Not HFCS

Some beekeepers feel that it best to use some type of feeder other than a Boardman feeder at the entrance of the hive. These have been known to start robbing, especially if there is no nectar flow in progress.

Different methods of feeding are available on our web site. Click on "[For Our Members](#)" then "[useful documents and links](#)"

OVER FEEDING THE COLONIES IN THE SPRING CAN LEAD TO BROODNEST CROWDING AND EVENTUALLY SWARMING.

Considering the conditions described above, top and bottom bodies can be reversed and this will put the bees and brood nest back down on the bottom. Some beekeepers consider this to be a stop-gap measure and a temporary fix until more time is available, the weather is warmer or it is time to make splits if that is the plan.

HIVE MANIPULATION

Two of the most common conditions that will cause a hive to swarm are:

1. Crowding of the brood nest area
2. A queen that is old or not in good condition

Both of these conditions can be determined with the initial inspection described above.

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Cautions:

Rearranging the frames in a hive is a very invasive process and should not be done when the weather is cool or windy.

When frames of brood or eggs are removed from the hive the bees cannot keep them warm and care must be taken to prevent them from being chilled.

When removing frames, start with one or two from the sides. These would be frames 1 or 2 and 9 or 10.

Removing a frame first that is in the brood nest increases the possibility of damaging the queen by “rolling” her as the frame is removed. Removing an end frame or two and temporarily leaving it out will provide more room to extract and replace frames without hurting the bees. As you prepare to extract a frame slide it slightly into the free space now available.

The bottom deep

Ideally, the brood nest will be in the center of the bottom deep surrounded on each side by frames of drawn comb, bee bread and honey.

If the brood nest is large enough, some beekeepers will insert a frame of drawn comb between each frame of brood but not more than one frame placed between each frame of brood. This will help to prevent crowding of the brood nest which is a major cause of swarming. It is ok to use frames of foundation for this if there is a honey flow in progress or if you do not any frames of drawn comb. Put the drawn comb closest to the brood nest.

The top deep

The upper hive body should have frames of drawn comb placed right above the brood nest on the bottom.

On each side of the frames of drawn comb should be placed any available frames of beebread and honey.

If no drawn comb is available use foundation.

After placing most of the frames of brood in the bottom hive chamber, if there are any frames of brood remaining, they can be placed in the upper super right above the brood that was placed in the lower super. When a large amount of brood is available some beekeepers will put a frame of brood above each frame of foundation that was placed in the bottom and a frame of foundation above each frame of brood. In this way the frames of brood and drawn comb are staggered. A process of this type is sometimes referred to as checker boarding. It is a way of expanding the brood nest to help prevent swarming.

Care should be taken to not spread out the brood nest by more than a single frame of drawn comb between each frame of brood because it will make it difficult for the bees to keep the brood warm.

Many beekeepers have determined that the bees will only draw out foundation when there is nectar being brought into the hive or when the hive is being fed sugar syrup.

Procedure tips

Before beginning the above manipulations it is a good idea to set the supers aside, preferably on an inverted top cover and clean the bottom board.

Many beekeepers will have an additional empty deep super that they will place on the cleaned bottom board and they will place the frames into it as described above.

Likewise an additional hive body can be used to place the remaining frames and it will become the top deep.

Perform the procedures as efficiently and quickly as possible so that the brood is not cooled down.

Many beekeepers will locate the queen and put her and the frame she is on in a safe place where she will not be harmed or fly away.