

Calendar for Keeping Bees

As of 02/09/18

January

It's time to build new equipment before you need to use it. It's easier to do it now rather than scramble for gear when your package arrives or you capture a swarm. Keeping good records will give you data to review on these cold winter days. Analyze what worked and what didn't. The bees stay in the hive except to go out for occasional cleansing flights (to defecate) on warm days. Remove any snow at the entrance to make sure there's ventilation. Remember to pay the annual dues for your local beekeeping organization.

February

February is an important time to make sure the hive has enough honey or food to maintain their hive temperature through cold spells. Open the hive on a fairly warm day and add more candyboard or fondant to feed the bees.

Find a bee supplier and order bees.

March

Many bees starve during this time of the year. Continually check hive, and feed more candyboard or fondant if necessary. Turn the electric bear fencing on again. Place a carpet tack strip at the front of the hive on the ground to deter small animals like raccoon. Can make your own with screws screwed through a piece of wood. Stake/tie strip so can't be moved.

The bees are beginning to move and expend energy. You may open the hive on a fairly warm day to inspect and treat for mites before the nectar flow begins. Begin feeding sugar water at a ratio of 1:1 with Honey-B-Healthy. Feed near the end of the month to prevent additional moisture in the hive.

April

The bees begin to bring in pollen for the season, so it's time for a thorough hive inspection. Look at the condition of the comb and if the bees are bringing in pollen. This also is a good time to look for signs of hive pests and diseases. Look for mites at all times. Assess whether the queen is laying eggs or do you need to re-queen the hive. Plan for plenty of room for the spring nectar. Add more boxes if necessary.

Do not eat bananas, even banana bread. Bees dislike the smell of bananas it has the same as the 'alarm' pheromone the bees use to alert hive of danger. Do not use Irish Spring soap. Bees do not like it. Avoid all strong smells.

Stay hydrated while working in the bee yard. For yards far away from home, tell a neighbor of your trip, and provide the fire number of where you are going. Consider getting an EpiPen just in case. Have cell number of neighbor/emergency contact in your phone. Carry an 'instant ice pack' for stings. Be prepared for quick exit from yard.

If you get stung, remove the stinger ASAP. Venom continues to be pumped by the stinger until empty or removed. Use a sharp edge to rub stinger out – credit card, knife edge, fingernail.

Wash clothes, or at least the sting site, after being stung. The venom on the clothing will attract bees to the same spot on the clothing and you can get stung again. Do not use hot water when washing clothing. Any wax/propolis can gum up the washing machine. No need to wash after every visit to the yard.

If bees get in your hair, walk away from the hive to an enclosed building and use the bee brush to gently brush bees out of hair. Do not do this 'outside' as the bees in your hair will attract more bees to you (alarm pheromone). Wear a veil or at least a cap/scarf.

Watch for Plantain leaves to make the vinegar spray for the itching of stings.

May

There should be a nice buzz of activity at the entrance. You should smell wax and honey at the hive. When you open the hive, look for nectar and pollen stores, and make sure there's a nice laying pattern in the brood chambers. Once area plants begin their nectar flow, you can place a super on the hive and remove the sugar water feeders. Do not leave pollen/protein patties in hive once bees stop eating them. The small hive beetle really likes the patties (pollen protein) and will have a feast and infect the hive. You can freeze patties for another time.

Keep an eye out for swarming behavior:

1. Reverse boxes to make the bees think they have more space, and identify queen cells.
2. Checkerboarding—alternating empty brood frames and honeycomb above the brood chambers to create space for the bees or, rather, make them think that they have more space. It doesn't require additional honey; just move empty honeycomb (a frame with drawn-out wax) into the spot from which you removed a frame with brood on it.
3. Split the hive to create another and give the bees time to build up their own honey supply before winter. By placing the queen and half of the hive in a new colony. Leave the remaining beehive queenless. There will be no brood for 42 days.

Smoker hints: Carry smoker in a non-flammable container. The smoker gets hot enough to melt truck bed liners, start grass on fire, and melt plastic, like your bee brush. When working in the bee yard, set smoker on a piece of concrete or other non-flammable material. May also use a metal pail and hang the smoker inside the pail using the smoker's 'hanger/hook'.

Don't force working a hive, especially if all the foragers are in the hive. Wait until the foragers leave for the day (sunny) so there are fewer bees in the hive to contend with.

June

The bees are in full swing. Check your beehive for a good laying pattern and a healthy queen. Add more honey supers as needed. Harvest any capped honey. Do not leave full honey supers where bees can get to them while waiting to extract honey. The bees will rob out the honey and return it to the hive. Honey supers left in garage with door open are an invite for a “bee party”.

Early honeys are light and mild. Later honey is darker and generally stronger. Keep the weeds down in the apiary and a clean yard for safe footing while working the hives.

July

Remove the entrance reducer to allow the bees to properly cool down their hive. Add honey supers as needed and harvest any capped honey. Watch for the dearth (no flowers blooming) and feed sugar water at a ratio of 1:1 if needed. Think about combining a weaker hive with a stronger one. Place newspaper between the two boxes of bees. When the newspaper has been chewed through, the colonies will have become acclimated to each other. The strongest queen will survive.

August

Replace the entrance reducer to give the bees a better chance to ward off thieving yellow jackets or other honey bees. With a particularly bad robbery cases, close up the hive for 24 hours and/or add robber screens. With no significant nectar flow, all bees become hungry and more active.

Make sure they have a good pollen store. Check honey stores, too. If you wish, you can place a drone-cell foundation frame in the hive for a chemical-free method of mite control.

September

A late-season nectar flow from goldenrod and wildflowers may produce additional honey. Feed sugar syrup at a ratio of 2:1 to ensure the bees build enough honey reserves for the winter. Harvest the honey supers and begin the preparations for winter by leaving the hive with two deeps and a medium super. Combine weak hives and eliminate pests. Once the honey supers are removed, apply chemical mite control. Always do this before or after honey production to avoid chemical contamination. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for the proper temperatures needed with autumn coming close. Consult with area beekeepers to see what treatments are done in our areas.

October

Check your hives for pests and adequate honey reserves. Treat one last time for Varroa mites before winter sets in. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for the proper temperatures needed with autumn coming close. Consult with area beekeepers to see what treatments are done in our areas. Begin feeding sugar syrup at a ratio of 2:1. Slide boards in to cover screened bottom boards.

November

Continue feeding the sugar syrup until it freezes. Stop treating for mites. Put on mouse guards and making sure the entrance reducer is in place. Provide top entrances for winter use. Wrap the hive and provide a wind break to your apiary.

December

Electric fences may be turned off when the cold of winter sets in.

Enjoy the products of your hives. Make fireplace starters by melting the old dark wax and dipping large pinecones in to coat with wax. Read new beekeeping books and make a wish list of items such as a beekeeping suit, equipment or even a different subspecies of Honey bee for the next season.

Ideas contributed from:

Bee Culture calendar

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