



SPRING START-UP

Getting bees ready for the new season

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Did the bees make it through the winter?

Colonies should be given a quick inspection as early in the spring as possible. The exact timing depends upon your location (earlier in warm zones, later in cold zones). You need not wait until the bees are flying freely every day. And you need not wait until the visible signs of spring (the appearance of buds and flowers). Do this first inspection on a sunny, mild day when there is no wind and the temperature is close to 50°F. Smoke your hives as usual and remove the outer and inner covers. Do you see the cluster? They should be fairly high in the upper deep hive body. If you don't see them, do you hear the cluster? Tap on the side of the hive and listen for a hum or buzzing. If it appears that you have lost your bees, take the hive apart and clean out any dead bees. Reassemble it and order a package of bees as soon as possible.

Do you have a queen?

During this initial inspection, look down between some of the frames. (Do you see any brood?) That's a good sign that the Queen is there. To get a better look, you may need to carefully remove a frame from the center of the top deep. Can you see any brood? Do you spot any eggs? This inspection should be done quickly, as you do not want to leave the frame open to the chilled air. If you do not see any brood or eggs, your hive may be without a queen. You should order a new queen as soon as possible (assuming the hive population is sufficient to incubate brood once the new queen arrives).

Do the bees have any honey?

During this first quick inspection, look down between the frames and see if you spot any honey. Honey is capped with white cappings (tan cappings are the brood). If you do see honey, that's great. If not, you should begin emergency feeding your bees (see information below).

Feed syrup to your bees

Whether there is honey in your hive or not, you should begin to feed your bees a several weeks before the first buds appear on the trees and before the first crocus has emerged. The colony should be fed a 1 to 1 solution of sugar syrup. This is a stimulative feeding for the queen. The ratio is one pound of granulated sugar dissolved in one pint of water. (NOTE: If the hive is seriously low on food, an initial two-to-one ratio will help them catch up faster.) This feeding can continue until you notice that the bees are bringing in their own food (you'll see the pollen on their legs). Note that a hivetop feeder works best when feeding bees. An excellent hivetop feeder is available from www.bee-commerce.com. We do not suggest using an entrance feeder this can cause robbing and this kind of feeder is not very accessible to the cluster (which is at the top of the hive at this time of year).

Feed pollen substitute to your bees

This is also the time that you should add pollen substitute to your hives. This will help strengthen your hive and stimulate egg laying in the queen. A handy way to accomplish this is to use "Brood Booster" available from www.bee-commerce.com. It comes pre-mixed and packaged in 2lb tubes. Brood Booster is easily applied to the top bars using a conventional caulking gun. This feeding can cease when you see the bees bringing in their own pollen.

Medicate your bees

- Medicated Syrup. In a small jar half filled with luke-warm water, add one teaspoon each of Fumidil® and Terramycin®. Shake the jar until dissolved. Stir the jar's contents into the

cooled sugar syrup solution you will use to feed your bees. Feed at top of hive using a hivetop feeder. This is a treatment for Nosema and Foulbrood.

- Apistan®. Place 2 Apistan® strips into the hive. One strip goes between frames 3 and 4 and one strip goes between frames 7 and 8. Leave them in the hive 42 days minimum. 52 days max. This is a treatment for Varroa mites.
- Menthol. When the weather starts to get warmer, a prepared bag containing 1.8 oz of menthol crystals should be placed on the top bars toward the rear of the hive. Set on a small piece of aluminum foil to prevent the bees from chewing holes in the bag and carrying it away. Leave in hive for 14 *consecutive* days when the outdoor temperature is ranging between 60-80°F. This is a treatment for Tracheal mites.
- HONEY B HEALTHY™. This new product promotes healthy vigorous hives by adding essential oils (lemongrass and spearmint). The beneficial properties of essential oils are well documented. Use as a feeding stimulant by adding to your sugar syrup solution. This new product was developed by Dr. Jim Amrine and Bob Noel (research pioneers in the use of essential oils to control varroa and tracheal mites). Just add a teaspoon of the concentrate to your spring feedings.

Reverse the hive bodies

Bees normally build comb, eat, make babies and move upwards. They were not making babies all winter, but they were in a cluster and eating the stored honey that was in the upper deep hive body. In the early spring, that upper deep is very full of everything and everybody. But the lower deep hive body is mostly empty. You can help matters by reversing the top and bottom deep hive bodies. This also gives you an opportunity to clean the bottom board and add a slatted rack.

So if a *mild day* comes along (50°F) with little or *no wind*, and bright clear *sunlight*, open your hive using your smoker in the usual way.

Place the upturned outer cover on the ground and then remove the upper deep hive body. Keep the inner cover on the deep and close the oval hole in the middle with a piece of wood shingle or tape. Place the deep across the edges of the outer cover, so there will be only four points of contact (you will squeeze less bees that way). Now you can see down into the lower deep that still rests on the bottom board. It is probably empty, but even if there are some inhabitants, lift it off the bottom board and place it crossways on the inner cover that is covering the deep previously removed.

Now scrape and clean the bottom board. NOTE: this is good opportunity to *add a slatted rack*, as you won't get another chance until Autumn. Top quality slatted racks are available from www.bee-commerce.com. They help with the hive's ventilation and can promote superior brood patterns (Slatted Racks encourage the queen to lay eggs all the way to the front of the hive, due to the improved ventilation and draft control).

Now stand the deep body (which had been the relatively empty bottom one) on one end and place on the ground. Then place the *full* hive body onto the clean bottom board (or on the slatted rack if you added one).

Smoke the bees and remove the inner cover so you can place the empty deep on top. Replace the inner and outer covers. This reversing procedure allows the bees to distribute brood, honey, pollen, fresh nectar and water. Reversing gives them more room upward in the direction that they always want to move. Repeat this reverse in about 3-4 weeks, restoring the hive to its original configuration. At this time you can put on the surplus honey super (assuming the bees are now bringing in their own food and you have ceased feeding and medicating).

For spring startup supplies and hivetop feeders, please visit www.bee-commerce.com.

Happy beekeeping!