



SWARM PREVENTION

Spring Reversal of Your Hives

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Because of your help (we hope you fed Brood Booster to your bees in late February and/or March) your colony is certainly in high gear during the spring months. So don't wait. Start in the early spring and take the first of a few steps to prevent swarming. A hive that swarms means fewer bees to collect a honey harvest for you.

Reversing Hive Bodies. Most beekeepers forgo reversing -- but most beekeepers have colonies that swarm. We all know that swarming and absconding are caused by several factors. Congestion and overcrowding are basically the same thing. They both help a colony to swarm. If the bees could talk to us, they would probably say, "*where the heck do you want me to put all the eggs? Where can we store the honey and pollen to feed the brood? Please give us some room.*"

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 above them in the upper deep hive body. If they were doing that all winter and started raising brood in the late winter, that upper deep is now very full of everything and everybody. Remember, bees build upwards. When they reach to top and run out of room, where would they GO? Correct: they would go "bye-bye".

You can help matters greatly by reversing the top and bottom deep hive bodies. This also gives you a great opportunity to scrape and clean the bottom board and add a slatted rack. Dead bees and accumulated debris should be removed by the beekeeper, if you want to help them.

So if a *mild day* comes along (50-55° F in the shade) with little or *no wind*, and bright clear *sunlight*, open your hive using your smoker in the usual way.

Remove a wall frame only and then inspect the next frame and the next without removing them (separate them gently and look down between them). See if some of those outer frames have honey. If they do, move them up to the bees -- but not directly into the cluster. You do not want to break their cluster. Do this on both sides of the hive.

Note that many colonies die with plenty of honey in the hive at this time of year (late March and into April). Why? Because if the honey is too far from the cluster, a cold snap can catch the bees by total surprise. Like a wall of glass, this sudden cold weather can cruelly prevent the bees from moving over to the honey. Remember, the bees will cluster loosely when it is 45-50° F. and gather tightly as the temperature goes down. This time of year their heat demands are greater because of brood rearing. That means they need more fuel for the stove (honey or your supplied syrup).

Now let's continue with the procedure.

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 or no bees that way).

Now you are looking 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.

Incidentally, few bees will leave from underneath that full hive body. Bees will generally stay put if the top of the hive body is covered.

Now clean the bottom board. Make a mental note to replace it in the Fall if you detect too much rot or disintegration. Scrape and clean. NOTE: this is good chance to *add a slatted rack*, as you won't get another chance until Fall. Top quality slatted racks are available from www.bee-commerce.com.

Now stand the deep body, which had been the relatively empty bottom one, on one end, on the ground. Then place the *full* hive body onto the 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 inner and outer covers and draw a deep breath...you are done.

At this point, you are probably saying to yourself, "Why do I have to go through this caper?" Well the answer is now fairly obvious. The bees always build and move upwards. So when the hive was loaded only at the top, they had nowhere to go and frequently will continue to crowd the upper deep until there is no more room ---and then they split (swarm). 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.

Happy beekeeping!