

FEEDING YOUR BEES

This winter feels quite cold, at least compared to last winter it does, which is the extent of my recall for past winters!!

Hopefully you all left enough of the bee's own honey in your hives to get them through most, if not all of late Autumn, Winter and early Spring. It's a long time, about 5 months!! Also the hive needs to be positioned where it will get maximum sun over this period and protection from cold winds. Remember that the hive also needs to be slightly tilted from the back towards the front entrance to ensure any moisture drains out. A top mat will decrease the space under the lid and help keep the hive warmer and finally the hive timber ware should all be in weatherproof condition. All these things help the bees in keeping their home as warm and dry as possible, however even the best prepared beekeeper can find that they may need to do some supplementary feeding over this long period.

How do we know if we need to feed our bees? The easiest way is to get an appreciation of the weight of your hive. So every few weeks lift the back of the hive. You should know if it's getting lighter. If you need to see a number then you can spend \$300-\$500 on scales that regularly send a weight record to your phone in the form of graph.

So you've decided to give your bees some food, what do you give and how?

Stored frames of capped honey - Yes you can give stored frames of capped honey back to the bees however the frames need to be put back in the same hive that you took them from, not different hives as you risk spreading potential pathogens such as AFB. Make sure you pick a warm day as you can to open the hive. Also freeze the frames for a couple of days before hand to kill any stages of wax moth, although they should have been stored in the freezer anyway.

Sugar Syrups (1:1 and 2:1) - don't feed bees sugar syrups as they will consume too much energy in just trying to reduce it into "honey", during the cold weather, using up their already low stores. Also 1:1 syrup will actually stimulate the queen into laying and so produce more mouths to feed which you don't want and also the bees will think there is a nectar source nearby and go looking for it, thereby reducing their lifespan. Early Spring when the weather starts to warm up you can give them some 2:1 sugar syrup to help build up their stores.

Dry white table sugar – This is a good option, simply lift the lid and pour a pile of sugar on the top mat of the hives and the bees will consume that.

Sugar Fondant – This is what I have been using on some of my hives. This is actually commercial white cake fondant for icing cakes and is made by supersaturating water with sucrose and glucose. As it is the consistency of soft icing I cut a couple of small square holes in my top mat so the bees can consume it from underneath without overly braking their cluster. (See attached photo's). You can purchase buckets of sugar fondant from Ben's Bees in Melbourne.

Today (Thursday 18/6/20) I went around and checked a lot of my hives (Mirboo North), overall they are fine. I topped up sugar fondant on 3 – 4 weaker ones (mainly 5 frame nucs) that I knew were weak going into winter. I will check them again in 3-4 weeks.

