



Beginner Bee-Keeping with David & Bronwyn Barton - September 2015 ©

Seasonal Hive Management

Spring

These notes are a simplified version of what is necessary for the recreational beekeeper to manage their hives through the seasons. These notes will give you the basics but if you want more information please consult further, more comprehensive beekeeping publications. Many publications are available online, in bookstores, on Amazon or in your local library. These all give a broad spectrum of ideas and theories for the best way to seasonally manage your beehives.



Spring is here and the bees are becoming more active. On a warm sunny day over 18c you can open your hive for the first time since winter.

It is the time to:

- Observe hive strength
- Look for problems within your hive e.g. disease and act accordingly
- See what stores are coming into the hive. Is there plenty of nectar and pollen? Are the bees capping honey?
- Check for eggs and brood. The Queen should have begun laying in earnest
- Are there any queen cells - either supercedure cells or swarm cells
- Clean any burr comb or extra propolis off frames and boxes
- Clean bottom boards looking for signs of beetle or moth grubs

- ▶ If planning to re-queen it should be done as soon as the weather is warm enough
- ▶ Add queen excluder above brood box/es
- ▶ Note condition of frames and replace darkened old frames when weather is suitable
- ▶ Be vigilant as the Swarming Season is here. Check for queen cells and ensure you practice good swarm management techniques. ***Refer** to swarm notes.
- ▶ Keep notes and fill in your cards as soon as you have finished each inspection.
- ▶ Combine weak colonies. One strong hive will do better than two weak ones.
- ▶ Please refer to dpi.nsw.gov.au Primefact 999 for 'Spring Management of Bees'

Summer

Colony numbers should be at their peak with bees 'boiling' over the sides of the frames as you pull them out of the box. Hopefully the nectar/honey flow is at it's peak also with the little ladies spending most of the daylight hours looking for food.

It is the time to:

- ▶ Continue to inspect brood frames for any signs of disease
- ▶ Continue to be vigilant as swarming can continue into the summer months
- ▶ You may be able to rob some honey before Christmas
- ▶ Extra supers can be added to suit the honey flow
- ▶ At the end of January you should be able to harvest some, and hopefully lots, of honey.
- ▶ Ensure you have replacement frames handy or replace the stickies (the frames you have just taken honey from) immediately after extraction. If you cannot replace them straight away make sure they are stores well away from any access by the bees. The sooner they go back into the hive for cleaning, the better.
- ▶ Utilise hot days to melt excess wax from de-capping, burr comb, old frames etc.
- ▶ Keep notes and fill in your cards as soon as you have finished each inspection

Autumn

By now you should have harvested your honey supers, replaced the stickies and may have been lucky enough to extract more during this time. Remember to ensure your bees will have enough supply to give them plenty to eat during winter.

It is the time to:

- ▶ Remember the bottom 2 supers are brood supers which means you leave them for the bees to give them a better chance of survival over winter. Leave them plenty. They have worked so hard for it and it will not only get them through the winter but give them a good strong start to the growing colony in Spring.
- ▶ Towards the end of Autumn it is the time to reduce your supers to maximum of 2 boxes as winter moves in - some apiarists winter them down to 1 box.
- ▶ Ensure the colony has at least 8 frames of honey available for a 2 box high hive or 4 frames of honey left for 1 box high.
- ▶ Be prepared with syrup feeders for the winter - just in case.
- ▶ Reduce the entrance in preparation for the cooler months and add mouse guards if you use them.
- ▶ Secure your hives and take care with your stored combs - Enemy no.1 - Wax Moth!. There are a number of ways apiarists store their combs but freezing the frames to kill any larvae or eggs is usually preferred. Seal and store in a well lit and ventilated place away from vermin attack or put boxes & frames in tightly sealed garbage bags. The frames will go mouldy if they get damp over the winter storage period.
- ▶ As above fill in your cards for the last inspection and packing down



Winter

Winter is here and your hives should have been wintered down, fed and secured.

It is the time to:

- ▶ Continue to monitor the entrance and unblock it if there is a build up of dead bees. This can happen during winter.
- ▶ Periodically check the weight of your hives, by lifting the back up, feed with sugar syrup or dry sugar if stores appear to be low.
- ▶ Ensure the wind and rain damage is minimal.
- ▶ Winter is the perfect opportunity to prepare your equipment for the upcoming season. Make new frames, embed foundation, build more supers, paint and repair any problems.
- ▶ Keep a check that things are going well with your bees. On warmer days in winter there should be some flying activity and even some pollen collection going on.
- ▶ Do not open your hives in the colder months unless there has been a cataclysmic disaster - e.g. the whole lot has been knocked down by a cow or a flood
- ▶ Please refer to dpi.nsw.gov.au Primefact 998 for 'Wintering Bees'

