

Thoughts on Your Busy Hives this Season

This note is targeted towards our newer members and includes a few suggestions for all members.

We have received a number of questions about how fast hives are building up due to the warm weather. The questions cover everything but most are concerned with feeding, swarm questions, and general “What should I be doing now?” questions. Many of us are scrambling at least a little watching our hives build up fast because of the unusually warm temperatures.

I focused my Ten Minutes with the Bees for March on these issues but wanted to send something out now. Note: I removed my Mouse Guards for 2 days (65 degrees) since they were backing up at the entrance.



Very Heavy Activity



Same Here!

Let's start with feeding. You should take advantage of the warm days (temps above 50, 60 even better) to pop the cover and take a peek. No need to disturb the frames unless you sense a problem. You can insert your hive tool into the frames near the top and if it comes out wet there is still honey available. If you are unsure or just want to add a little cheap insurance, whip up a small batch of sugar cakes, place a spacer (shim) on top and put a couple chunks of the cakes on the top bars. I normally chicken out and put some on mine mid to late March but added early for reasons above. A couple of my hives have supers on so I did not add to those hives. Again, just cheap insurance so you can sleep nights! If it is sunny, your bees **PROBABLY** will not even acknowledge you are there. They will be too happy gathering nectar and pollen. Another Joy of Spring. Life is good.



Sugar Cakes or Fondant with Shim



Hive Tool with Honey

Another question was should I be feeding my hives pollen patties or sugar syrup? Unless you have a definite reason (and the experience to make the decision) most beekeepers never feed SS to a healthy over wintered hive. They don't need it! The bees will just store it and it may possibly contribute to early swarming. Same goes for PP, which leads to early buildup (which is why we are discussing this)! Ignore this if you have special reasons and know why you are feeding PP.

One possible exception: If you have been feeding your bees all winter, especially PP, you may want to reduce that feed but not eliminate it. If we get a cold snap your hive may have built up more than others and could struggle for food while they can't fly.

The other question we have received is "Is my hive going to swarm?" or "How do I know when they might swarm". This one is NOT always easy to answer but this may help. Honey bees build up their brood production based on daylight hours, temps, and food supplies. Swarm Fever normally begins when the boxes are getting full and the bees need more space. BUT... hives will not try to swarm until they have raised drones to mate with new queens. They PROBABLY are not doing that yet. When they start it takes 24 days for drones to emerge and 10-16 days to mature. So, you are PROBABLY safe for at least 5-6 weeks. **Please take note of the capitalized words above!**

The bottom line is this has been a wonderful start to the year for our bees! That's good. The main concern is if the temps stay steady. But no matter what, it is a **Happy** problem!

For what it is worth, the growing degree days is 61 right now and is soaring. Silver Maples bloomed at 34 and Red Maples will hit full bloom at 75.

So, keep an eye on your bees and enjoy the journey!

Paul