

EAST TEXAS BEEKEEPERS MONTHLY GUIDE BOOK

FORWARD

Members of the EAST TEXAS BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION compiled this pamphlet during the year of 1992. It is intended as a guide for new beekeepers in Smith and surrounding counties. We realize that hive and weather conditions dictate when a beekeeper can work hives. This booklet will give a beekeeper a time frame during which the correct conditions will likely occur. The information in this book should not be considered as "gospel". A new beekeeper should own one of the several good "How To" books. How to Keep Bees and Sell Honey published by the Walter Kelly company and First Lessons In Beekeeping published by the Dadant company are two very good books.

GOOD LUCK

PREFACE – SECOND EDITION

In the 6 years since the ETBA first published this booklet, beekeeping has changed considerably. Feral honeybee populations have been decimated by the Varroa mite, the Africanized bee has spread across the Southern states from Texas to California, and the domestic honeybee has become increasingly important to US agriculture. These changes have affected beekeeping in East Texas as well. Few domestic colonies survive today without informed management by the beekeeper. Toward that end the ETBA has updated this booklet to help the novice and the veteran alike to effectively manage their colonies.

The ETBA is currently enjoying a period of growth. We hope the information in this booklet will help our new members be successful beekeepers from the beginning. But remember – the best source of knowledge is your fellow beekeeper. This organization represents hundreds of years of beekeeping experience. Don't hesitate to ask our members for help. Be faithful to attend ETBA monthly meetings and the occasional workshop.

WELCOME TO ETBA.

JANUARY

January begins the beekeeping year in the northern part of East Texas. January is the time of the year when some pollen from elm trees may be available. It is also the time when package bees and queens can be ordered for delivery after April 1. The year's first broodnest exam may take place during January. Plan to examine hives when the air temperature is at least 60 degrees, when the sun is shining, and there is little wind blowing. Make this exam as quick as possible.

Clean old frames and hive boxes to be used in the spring. There are several ways to clean and sterilize used woodenware to prevent the spread of disease.

Method #1

Scrape as much propolis and wax as possible from the wood frames. Dissolve 10 oz. of lye in a small amount of cold water. Add this to cold water in a 55 gallon drum that has been cut in 1/2. A propane "fish cooker" style burner, or open pit fire can be used as the heat source. Bring the mixture to a boil and immerse frames. Hold them down with a garden rake until all the wax has dissolved. Remove frames with rake and wash with water from the garden hose.

Method #2

Use a hive tool to remove as much wax and propolis as possible from frames and boxes. Use a propane torch to scorch frames on all surfaces. Scorch boxes on the inside.

WEEK 1,2,3,4

Repair hives and frames. Order supplies. Examine hives. Order queens and packages.

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FEBRUARY

February is a very important month for beekeepers. If the weather has not permitted colony exams in January then colonies should be examined in early February. Look for the presence of disease, failing queens, and ample stores of honey. It is generally agreed that any hive of bees should not have less than 1 or 2 9-5/8" frames of honey. A strong colony during the first weeks of February will have from 6 to 10+ frames of bees and 10 to 30+ pounds of honey. Hives found to have inadequate stores of honey should be fed. Feed diluted honey (80% honey to 20% water), or sugar syrup at a 2 sugar to 1 water ratio. Colonies found to have low populations, (<2 frames of bees), can be combined with strong colonies.

Sometime during the month of February the seasons first nectar will be available for the bees to forage on. One of keys to East Texas beekeeping is to plan hive operations to coincide with the early fruit tree, dewberry, and pear tree bloom. When these plants start to bloom it is time to medicate colonies, change out old hive bodies, or add frames of foundation to overwintered colonies.

WEEK 1

Examine hives

Clean and repair woodenware

Medicate hives

WEEK 2

Move colonies to new outyards

WEEK 3,4

Complete hive exams

Add frames of foundation and feed needy

Colonies

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MARCH

With the coming of March the beekeepers year gets into high gear. March will generally have some very warm days that will give bees more opportunity to fly on forage trips. Swarms can occur in March.

If an early plum tree, hawthorn tree, and pear tree bloom did not occur during the last of February expect to see these bloom in the early part of March. Later blooms in March include black locust, red bud, wild cherry, wild onion, laurel, blueberries, red maple, hairy vetch, chickweed, and dollarweed. During the last part of March clover will bloom along the side of highways.

March is a key month for East Texas beekeepers. Eggs laid by a queen in March will become the bees which bring in the honey crop.

A queen will require more and more egg laying room this month. Swarms will issue if brood nest congestion occurs.

Brood box reversals and supering can take place in March. Plan to work bees on the warm days to avoid chilling brood. It is generally agreed that supers can be on by March 15. Plan to have medication out of hives before the first supers go on.

WEEK 1,2

Reverse brood boxes

Feed

Add second brood box to needy colonies

WEEK 3,4

Remove medication, (extender patties may be left on hive).

Add Supers

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APRIL

April is the month when the major honey flow will kick into gear. Swarms are more frequent in April. This is also the month to receive queens and package bees. Major nectar producers in April include red clover, vetch, hedges, wildflowers, Yucchi clover, and some trees such as prickly ash.

Watch honey supers closely during April. If bees are working on 6-8 frames it will be time to add another super. Empty supers may be added either above or below full supers. Bees need plenty of room to store the abundant nectar which comes with April Give bees enough room

so that nectar does not get stored in the brood nest. 3 to 4 supers per hive is generally enough for a season.

If queens or packages were ordered for delivery in April now is the time to use them. To make a 5 frame nuc remove 2 frames of brood and bees and 1 frame of pollen and honey from a strong colony. Place this in the middle of a 5 frame nuc box and add two frames of foundation. A 10 frame brood box can be substituted for the nuc box. Introduce a young queen to the new colony. Feed 2 x 1 sugar syrup until all frames are drawn then add another brood box and continue to feed until that box is also full.

WEEK 1,2

Super production colonies

Reverse brood chambers

Make new colonies with package bees

Make nucs from strong colonies

WEEK 3,4

Add Supers

Feed nucs and look for swarms

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MAY

May is another important month for area beekeepers. There will probably be more swarming in May. For the most part however, May is a repeat of April. Look for strong flows from wildflowers and yucchi clover. Other nectar sources may include vines such as ratan and virginia creeper.

New colonies can be started in May. Package bees are available in May.

During some years there may be some combs of honey fully capped and ready to be extracted during May. This first honey is generally light. After extracting, honey combs may be returned to the hive to be refilled. Check supers weekly during this month. Add more supers as they are needed.

May is a good month to get new comb drawn. Add frames of wax foundation or entire supers of wax foundation to hives. A general rule is to add supers of foundation below the queen excluder. Add supers of drawn comb above excluders.

WEEK 1,2,3,4

Super

Make new colonies

Feed new colonies

Look for swarms

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JUNE

By the time June arrives in our area the honey flow has wound down. There may be some nectar coming in from sumac and perhaps horsemint. In most years the main flow will end in June.

During June the honey harvest can begin. There are several methods for removing full supers from hives.

- 1) Use a fume board to chase bees from supers. Fume boards work best in very hot weather.
- 2) Use a bee escape board beneath supers. This method requires more than one trip to the bee yard to remove supers.
- 3) Brush bees from the combs one comb at a time. This is a time consuming method and can anger bees.
- 4) Remove supers from hives and blow bees out with a "bee blower".
- 5) Smoke bees from supers.

Plan to harvest honey when the weather is dry and warm.- Try to extract only those frames of honey that are at least 3/4 capped.

New colonies can also be started in the month of June but they need to be fed more than those started in April. This is due to the fact that a major honey flow is not generally underway in June.

WEEK 1,2,3,4

Extract supers

Make nucs

Feed young colonies

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JULY

July is the month when honey extraction can be in full swing. Although horsemint and a few other nectar sources may be still in bloom it is improbable that a surplus can be gathered in July.

July is a month when robbing can become a problem. Make sure that "wet" supers are not exposed to bees unless having the supers robbed clean is the intent. To help prevent weak colonies from being robbed be careful not to drip honey in the bee yard when removing supers.

Temperatures are usually high enough in July to melt wax in a solar style melter. Bees gather water to cool hives during hot weather. Make sure you provide a water source if no natural sources are available.

If new colonies were started in any of the previous few months make sure they are provided with room to grow and food if they need them.

WEEK 1

Extract honey

Melt wax

Feed nucs WEEK 2,3,And 4

Repeat of Week 1

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AUGUST

August. is a hot and dry month in our part of Texas. There is little for bees to forage on other than bitter weed or perhaps some honeydew. Bees will gather large amounts of water in August. Colonies will be very cranky and bad tempered during the nectar dearth that comes with August. Take care when opening hives that bees do not become overly excited. Continue to extract honey and melt wax in August. If wax cappings are not melted soon after extracting then a beekeeper can freeze cappings for melting at a later date. Cappings or "wet" supers can be left exposed for foraging bees to clean. "wet " supers may also be returned to the hive for the bees to clean.

Store cleaned supers in a cool and dry area. Place a super on a newspaper and stack 2 more supers on top of them. Cover the third super with an 8" x 8" piece of paper and pour 1/4 cup of moth crystals on it. Continue to stack supers in this manner until all have been stored. Cover the very top super with a hive cover over the moth crystals and newspaper. Allow supers 24 hr. to "air-out" before returning them to hives in the spring.

WEEK I

Extract honey

Melt wax

Clean and store combs

Feed nucs

WEEKS 2,3,4,

Repeat of Week 1

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SEPTEMBER

September is an important month in our area. The month of September is the beekeepers month for finishing any extracting the has not been completed. This is time for decisions about medication to be made.

Usually our area of the state will have a short fall honey flow. Nectar from goldenrod and asters is available most years. Strong hives will store a surplus. If bees are medicated in September then supers should not be

on hives. September is also the month in which nucs to be overwintered can be started. A good 5 frame nuc made during the first week of September will overwinter nicely and probably make a crop of honey in the spring.

Examine hives carefully in September. Failing queens can be replaced now. Weak hives can be combined with strong hives.

Medicate hives with menthol and terramycin during the later part of this month.

WEEK 1

Make nucs

Store cleaned supers

Examine hives

Medicate

WEEK 2

Medicate

Examine hives

Feed nucs

WEEK 3,4

Repeat of week 2

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OCTOBER

By the middle of October there is usually a good pollen and nectar flow in progress. This nectar and pollen will remain available until the first freeze. This time will be the last chance for bees to put up winter stores without being fed. Any colony found to be short on stores will have to be fed sugar syrup at the ratio of 2 parts sugar to 1 part water. Liquid sugar from a bakery may also be fed. If honey is fed it must be free of foul brood and other disease pathogens. Methods of feeding include a "division board" style feeder and 1 gallon paint cans which have small holes punched in the lid. These paint cans are inverted on a queen excluder at the top of the hive and covered with an empty hive body and top cover.

Complete any medication this month. Combine weak hives with strong ones. Complete hive exams.

WEEK 1,2,3,4

Medicate

Feed light hives

TIP

To separate hive bodies which have been heavily "glued" together with propolis and burr comb follow this hint. Wrap a piece of stove pipe wire completely around the hive at the junction of the boxes to be separated. Using a pair of pliers, twist the wire until it cuts through the propolis all the way around the box. The wire may then be pulled through and the boxes will separate nicely.

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NOVEMBER

By the time November arrives most of the work in the bee yard should be complete. Entrance reducers can go on in November.

Check for stores by lifting on the back of hives. Light hives need to be fed.

Menthol or terramycin not already on hives can go on now.

Work in the shop on old hive bodies can be done in November. Repair cracks in hive bodies with water base wood putty or Dap. Frames of old dark comb or drone comb can be cleaned and fitted with new foundation.

WEEK 1,2,3,4

Medicate colonies

Feed light hives

Work in shop

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DECEMBER

December is the time of the year to enjoy good cheer and the holidays. Beekeepers can use this time to reflect on the past year, go over notes, and enjoy the fruits of labor. We can make plans for the coming year and marvel at the amazing honeybee. January is not far off and it will 'be time to take a peek in those hives once again.

WEEK 1,2,3,4

Work in the shop

Enjoy life

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MEDICATION

For the control-prevention of American and European fowlbrood use Terramycin Soluble Powder (available in most farm supply stores.).

Three TM 25 formulas follow...

Extender patties

2 patties:

1/3 lb. Crisco

2/3 lb. granulated or powdered sugar

2 Tablespoons TM 25

6 patties:

1 lb. Crisco

2 lb. granulated or powdered sugar

6 Tablespoons TM 25

20 patties:

3 lbs. Crisco

6 lbs. granulated sugar

6.4 oz. TM 25

For control of tracheal mites use 25-50 grams of menthol in early spring and fall. Menthol works best if the temperature is 80+ degrees. Apistan strips are used at the same time for control of varroa mites. Use as directed.

For the control of nosema mix 1 teaspoon of Fumidil-B to 1 gallon of syrup. Recommended feeding is 2 gallons, spring and fall. Nosema has not proven to be a problem in East Texas to date.

REQUEENING

Having a good queen is essential to maintaining a strong, productive, disease resistant colony. Most good queen bees last 1 or 2 years. Requeening hives is basic to good management.

Colonies can be requeened in the spring, through the summer, or in the fall. The most popular time to requeen in our area is in the early fall. Spring requeening is done in April and May. Fall requeening is done in September or early October.

Beekeepers in our area use several methods to requeen. The most popular method involves the removal of the queen to be replaced. A new queen is then placed in the colony in a cage, which allows the worker bees to release her after a day or two. The second method involves making a small new colony or "nuc" using a young queen. When this "nuc" is well established with new bees from the new queen then it is combined with the colony to be requeened. The colony to be requeened may or may not have its "old" queen removed.

No matter which method of requeening is used, there is a risk that the "new" queen will not be accepted.

There are many very good sources for buying queens. Spring queens from most breeders are available after April 1 of each year. Some breeders in Florida, California, and Hawaii, have queens for March delivery. Summer prices are cheaper than spring prices.

The ETBA has several videos in its library, which provide more detailed instruction on requeening. This is a very important subject for the serious beekeeper. Make every effort to use all the learning resources the club has made available to you. The importance of good management in this area can not be overstated.