

Beekeeper's Calendar

<http://wolfcreekbees.com/calendar.htm>

JANUARY

- This is the time for ordering your bees in order to get them by spring in your shipping zone. Because of CCD there is a shortage of bees, so be sure and order early.
- Order early your new equipment such as frames and wax so as to avoid the spring rush delays.
- If you have bees, this is the time to start checking your hives for stores. By now there should be at least 15 lbs. of honey for them to eat on. That would be about six shallow supers of capped honey (2 ½ lbs. per frame or 3 ½ lbs. per medium frame or 6 - 7 lbs. per deep frames). With mediums you will need to have 3 or 4 frames of capped honey and deeps need to have 2 to 3 frames of capped honey at this time.
- Check all hives in your apiary for missing tops since high winds can blow them off. We use a solid brick on top to keep them in place.
- Be sure and check for muddy paw prints on the landing boards if your hives are sitting on blocks or stands that are close to the ground. These are usually from skunks trying to get the bees to come out of the hive in order to defend it, thus becoming the skunk's midnight snack. To stop this, raise the hive up so the skunk can't reach it or put a carpet tack strip on the edge of the landing board with the tacks facing forward towards the entrance of the hive. The tacks will stick their paws when they pull them back, thus stopping the attacks, but will not harm the bees.

FEBRUARY

- Now is the time to open your hives and check for a laying queen, diseases and brood. Only open the hive if the temperature is 50-55 degrees with the sun shining and no wind blowing.
- Look again at the honey stores. If less than 15 lbs, then you must feed them. Wetted sugar is the best way to go this time of the year. This is done by removing the outer cover and inner covers. Place one sheet of newspaper on top of the frames making sure that it is placed right over the brood. Place some sugar on the paper, wetting it lightly as you go with water using a new spray bottle. Continue adding and wetting sugar until it reaches the top of the inner cover that will be turned upside down on top of it. The sugar is held in place by the newspaper. The bees will remove the paper as they move up to eat the moist sugar. Another way to feed the bees is to make a fondant candy and place directly over the cluster of bees. They will eat up into the candy. A large batch can be made by using 15 lbs. of sugar, 4 cups of water and 3 3/4 tsp. of vinegar.
- When checking a hive, the bees should cover 5 frames or so. If not, you might think about uniting the hive with a strong one that has a good queen. This can be done by removing the weak queen from the hive. To unite the two hives, place a sheet of newspaper on top of the frames of the strong hive after removing the outer and inner covers. Then cut 5 or 6 slits in the paper running parallel with the frames. Place the weak hive on top and replace the outer and inner covers. Both hives will be working hard to remove the newspaper that they will not kill each other and will become one hive. Just make sure they have honey for the combined hive.
- If you do not have a natural source of pollen, you will need to feed them a pollen substitute.
- By mid February, the queen starts to lay eggs so as to have in the colony 60,000 to 80,000 worker bees by the peak honey flow. As the new bees become 15 or so days old,

they will start to secrete wax platelets which they use to expand the colony. Put on a honey super of drawn out comb. Remove every other one and replace it with new wax foundation. By doing so, this gives the bees a place to put the new platelet of wax, thus making them think they have plenty of room to expand the colony. Giving them more supers as needed to place the new wax will help them to make more honey than ever before. If there is no place for them to put the wax, they will prepare to swarm in about six weeks.

- Mid February is the time to start feeding the bees a sugar syrup mixture containing Tea Tree Oil to control Nosema. This is made with 2 parts sugar to 1 part water for this time of the year. To make 2 gallons, you will need 2 5/8 qt. of sugar and 3 1/2 qt. of hot water (if using city water, boil to remove the chlorine as for a baby bottle and cool to touch) then add sugar. Varroa mites can be controlled with Wintergreen Oil.

MARCH

- If the colony does not have at least 15 lbs. of honey, then feed them.
- In March, as a rule, the brood will be in the top box. The boxes must be reversed at this time. This is done by placing the top box on the bottom and the empty bottom box on the top. Never split the brood chamber if they are in the middle of the two boxes; wait until the bees move into the top box or place the empty bottom box on top if using the 3 medium boxes. The new queen will work up into the box. In about 2 weeks until the honey flow begins. By doing so, the numbers will increase and the queen will think she has plenty of room to expand the colony.
- Start the spring stimulant feeding by late March.

APRIL

- The colonies that are strong should have 60,000 to 80,000 bees. They will eat up considerable amounts of honey using up all their reserves and can easily starve prior to the honey flow.
- Feed all colonies that have less than 15 lbs. of honey. Be sure and check for diseases and mites at this time.
- April is a good month to install package bees. New foundation helps to get package bees off to a good start. Feed all new packages Tea Tree Oil for Nosema. When installing a package of bees, make sure the closer is in place under the screen bottom board. Remove it every 2 weeks and clean off all the bits of wax because wax moths will get in and lay their eggs in it. The bees like to draw out the foundation in total darkness. If you have drawn comb, add 2 or 3 frames along with 2 frames of brood from one of your strong hives. This will give your new package a boost.
- During the honey flow, add new foundation for drawing comb in the upper body placed right over the brood chamber.
- Prolific queens and ample food will create strong colonies. Adding a super of drawn comb will help relieve crowding. This will insure a good honey crop.
- Supers for honey storage should be added by April 15.
- Supers with cut comb foundation should be prepared just before using so that they will not sag.
- Entrance reducers should be removed from strong overwintered colonies by the 15th of April.
- Entrance reducers should be removed from colonies installed in April by the 15th of June.

MAY

- When a super becomes 1/2 to 3/4 full of honey, it is time to add another super. This is usually about 6 - 7 frames. This can be done by removing the partially filled super off the hive and placing the empty super of drawn comb on top of the brood chamber. Then replace the partially filled super on top of the empty super.
- If you can extract the honey from a super as it becomes capped, it will do two things. It will give the bees a place to put more honey. Taking one super off at a time and extracting it will give the honey a very distinct taste and not that of a blend. It also frees up the need to purchase additional supers.
- Be sure and keep empty supers on all the colonies until after the honey flow.

JUNE

- All swarms occurring after June 1st should be combined with weaker colonies. Continue to check for swarm cells every 7 days.
- Adding supers of drawn comb should be added as needed until after the honey flow.
- Uncapped honey can be extracted by pulling the frame straight up out of the hive and rotating the bottom away from you until it is about 3/4 away from being vertical, giving a hard downward shake. If nothing comes out of the cells, the honey can be extracted without the fear of fermenting.

JULY

- Extract honey by June 15th in order to have the supers available for the sourwood honey flow in July.
- Extracted supers should be returned to the supers to the colonies just before dark in order to prevent robbing.
- Honey should be packed in all new glass jars and lids or plasticware. After July 15, swarms should be combined with weaker colonies.
- This is also the time to check for Varroa mites.

AUGUST

- This is the time to requeen those colonies that need a new queen.
- 50 - 60 pounds of honey per hive will be needed for the colony to survive the winter.
- Check your requeened colonies in 10 days for a laying queen. Do not disturb if eggs are present.
- Continue extracting full supers of honey. Replace extracted supers on colonies just before dark in order to prevent robbing.

SEPTEMBER

- Colonies need to be checked for Varroa mites at this time. If numerous mites are found treat with Wintergreen Oil.
- (see Organic Treatments page)
- Tracheal mites can be treated by enclosing 1.6 ounces of menthol crystals in a screen wire pouch and placing it on top of the brood chamber. This should be done when the temperature is in the 70's. Treat if necessary.
- Clean all boxes by first removing old wax and propolis. Wash all boxes, lids and bottom boards that are not on the hives with a 10% bleach solution. This is 9 parts water to 1 part bleach. We use a dedicated garden sprayer for this. Then use a high pressure washer to remove all dirt and propolis. Let air dry until all moisture is removed. When this is done, fill all cuts, seams and dings with White Lightning 3006 adhesive caulk. This caulk has very little out gassing. Let dry 4 - 5 hours and then paint only the outside of the hive, top and bottom of the rims.

- Any combs with more than 2 square inches of drone cells should be culled and rendered into blocks of wax.

OCTOBER

- Once again, check for Varroa mites. If many are found, treat with Wintergreen Oil (see Organic Treatments page).
- Entrance reducers should be installed at this time.
- Make sure each colony has a laying queen.
- All colonies that do not have at least 50 lbs. of honey should be fed. A deep frame will hold 6 -7 lbs. of honey, while a medium frame hold 3 1/2 lbs. With a shallow frame holding 2 1/2 lbs.
- Feed Tea Tree Oil to prevent Nosema.

NOVEMBER

- Prevent fires from around your colonies by raking away all dead grass and leaves. It is a good idea to cut any tall grass from around the colony.
- All tops should be checked to make sure they are waterproof. Also, place a weight on top to keep the wind from blowing it off.
- All colonies need to be top ventilated. This can be done by cutting 3/4 inch slots out of the rim of the inner cover. Place the rim with these openings to the front of the hive. Place the out cover over the inner cover and sliding the outer cover forward. Secure the cover with a weight on top.

DECEMBER

- Repair and paint equipment.
- Render all old comb into blocks of wax.