

THE BEEKEEPER'S YEAR

This is a suggested checklist of activities for the beekeeper. Note that weather, climate, neighborhood and even the type of bees you have will influence such activities. The list gives you an overview of what's going on each month in the hive. It also suggests some important tasks for the beekeeper, and provides a rough estimate of the amount of time you might spend with your bees during a given month. Check this site frequently for additional detail and special notes.

January

The Bees. The queen is surrounded by thousands of her workers. She is in the midst of their winter cluster. There is little activity except on a warm day (about 45-50 degrees) when the workers will take the opportunity to make cleansing flights. There are no drones in the hive, but some worker brood will begin to appear in the hive. The bees will consume about 25 pounds of stored honey this month.

The Beekeeper. Little work is required from you at the hives. If there is heavy snow, make certain the entrance to the hive is cleared to allow for proper ventilation. If a January thaw presents itself (in January or February) you provide supplemental, emergency food for the bees such as fondant (on the top bars) or granulated sugar (on the inner cover). This is a great time to catch up on your reading about bees, attend bee club meetings, and build and repair equipment for next season. Order package bees (if needed) from a reputable supplier.

Time Spent. Estimate less than an hour.

February

The Bees. The queen, still cozy in the cluster, will begin to lay a few more eggs each day. It is still "females only" in the hive. Workers will take cleansing flights on mild days. The bees will consume about 25 pounds of honey this month.

The Beekeeper. There is not too much to do this month. Attend those bee club meetings. Read. Attend bee club meetings, and get your equipment ready for spring.

Time Spent. Estimate less than one hour.

March

The Bees. This is the month when colonies can die of starvation. However, if you fed them plenty of sugar syrup in the autumn this should not happen. With the days growing longer, the queen steadily increases her rate of egg laying. More brood means more food consumed. The drones begin to appear. The bees will continue to consume honey stores.

The Beekeeper. Early in the month, on a nice mild day, and when there is no wind and bees are flying, you can have a quick peek inside your hive. It's best not to remove the frames. Just have a look-see under the cover. If you do not see any sealed honey in the top frames, you may need to provide some emergency food (fondant or granulated sugar if cold temps prevail, syrup if the weather is mild). But remember, once you start, you should not stop until they are bringing in their own food supplies. If you are going to do a spring Varroa mite treatment, now (or soon) is the time to start its application.

Time Spent. Estimate 2 hours this month.

April

The Bees. The weather begins to improve, and the early blossoms begin to appear. The bees begin to bring pollen into the hive. The queen is busily laying eggs, and the population is growing fast. The drones will begin to appear.

The Beekeeper. On a warm and still day do your first comprehensive inspection. Can you find evidence of the queen? Are there plenty of eggs and brood? Is there a nice pattern to her egg laying? Later in the month, on a very mild and windless day, you should consider reversing the hive bodies. This will allow for a better distribution of brood, and stimulate the growth of the colony. You can begin to feed the hive

medicated syrup.

Time Spent. Estimate 3 hours.

May

The Bees. Now the activity really starts hopping. The nectar and pollen should begin to come into the hive thick and fast. The queen will be reaching her greatest rate of egg laying. The hive should be bursting with activity.

The Beekeeper. Spring mite treatments should be completed, and removed prior to adding any honey supers. Add a queen excluder, and place honey supers on top of the top deep. Watch out for swarming. Inspect the hive weekly. Attend bee club meetings and workshops.

Time Spent. Estimate 4-5 hours this month.

June

The Bees. Unswarmed colonies will be boiling with bees. The queen's rate of egg laying may drop a bit this month. The main honey flow should happen this month.

The Beekeeper. Inspect the hive weekly to make certain the hive is healthy and the queen is present. Add honey supers as needed. Keep up swarm inspections. Attend bee club meetings and workshops.

Time Spent. Estimate 4-5 hours.

July

The Bees. If the weather is good, the nectar flow may continue this month. On hot and humid nights, you may see a huge curtain of bees cooling themselves on the exterior of the hive.

The Beekeeper. Continue inspections to assure the health of your colony. Add more honey supers if needed. Keep your fingers crossed in anticipation of a great honey harvest.

Time Spent. Estimate 2-3 hours.

August

The Bees. The colony's growth is diminishing. Drones are still around, but outside activity begins to slow down as the nectar flow slows.

The Beekeeper. No more chance of swarming. Watch for honey robbing by wasps or other bees. There is not too much for you to do this month. Have a little holiday.

Time Spent. Estimate about an hour or two.

September

The Bees. The drones may begin to disappear this month. The hive population is dropping. The queen's her egg laying is dramatically reduced.

The Beekeeper. Harvest your honey crop. Remember to leave the colony with at least 60 pounds of honey for winter. Check for the queen's presence. Feed and medicate towards the end of the month (the first 2 gallons is medicated). Apply mite treatment. Continue feeding until the bees will take no more syrup. Attend bee club meetings.

Time Spent. Estimate 2-3 hours.

October

The Bees. Not much activity from the bees. They are hunkering' down for the winter.

The Beekeeper. Watch out for robbing. Configure the hive for winter, with attention to ventilation and moisture control. Install mouse guard at entrance of hive. Setup a wind break if necessary. Finish winter

feeding. Attend bee club meetings.
Time Spent. Estimate 2 hours.

November

The Bees. Even less activity this month. The cold weather will send them into a cluster.
The Beekeeper. Store your equipment away for the winter. Attend bee club meetings.
Time Spent. About one hour this month.

December

The Bees. The bees are in a tight cluster. No peeking.
The Beekeeper. There's nothing you can do with the bees. Read a good book on beekeeping, and enjoy the holidays!
Time Spent. None

