

**Swarming  
Swarm Traps  
Steps to prevent Swarms  
Splitting hives**

# Swarming

Swarming is a natural response by the bees to propagate insuring colony survival or due to overcrowding.

Although it is a natural response it can be a great loss in honey and possibly weakening the mother hive.

Swarming could cost you your honey for that year.

Sometimes the offshoot swarm will make honey but not always.

## **Stages of a new queen hatched in a swarmed hive.**

First of all the new queen may not have hatched prior to the swarm leaving.

A queen takes 16 to 17 days to develop and hatch. A hive that has swarmed may not see a queen hatch for 2 or 3 days.

Day 17 to 21 the queen matures or hardens.

Day 21 to 24 the queen makes orientation flights.

Day 21 to 28 the queen makes mating flights.

Day 25 to 35 the queen starts laying.

Once the queen is laying it will take her at least 7 to 14 days to lay enough brood to start to replace the lost population.

It will take that brood an additional 42 days to hatch two cycles of brood to bring the hive to a population that would be able to make excess honey.

The swarmed hive would have lost over 90 days and most likely missed the nectar flow all together in this portion of the USA.

# Examples of Swarm Traps



**Sometimes things do not go as designed.  
The bees did not get the memo.**



**A basic very simple design.**



You can use a 5 frame nuc box with a entrance reducer with the small hole open. A swarm with a reduced population is looking for a location that is easily defendable.

Assemble using Titebond III glue and nails.

Sides are 19 x 15 (2 needed)

Ends are 11 x 15 (2 needed)

Bottom is 20 x 11 (1 needed)

Top is  $21 \frac{5}{8}$  x  $11 \frac{1}{8}$

The feet and the end strips on the migratory cover are self explanatory. Just put on what looks right. I used some pressure treated strips for the feet in case they sit in a damp place but don't think this is critical at all.

The rails that hold the frames are 1/2" MDO strips. They are installed 3/4" from the top edge to allow bee space over the tops of the frames.

The hole is 1 1/4" and the bottom edge of the hole is 2" from the bottom edge of the box. I have metal entry discs on order from Walt Kelly that will be used to close the entrances after a swarm has moved in.



I put a screened hole in the bottom of the box about 4 inches in diameter and cover it from the outside with a scrap of wood. After catching a swarm and closing the Kelly disc the board covering the screen hole will be removed to allow ventilation during transport back to my bee yard.

All of this matches what was most successful for Dr. Seely writer of Honeybee Democracy, so it should work just fine.

Rub the inside of the trap and the entrance hole with beeswax. This will make it smell more like home.

Put three frames of old comb in the trap with a few drops of lemongrass oil.

## *Finding a Location for a Swarm Trap*

The biggest part of swarm trapping is finding a good spot to put the hive. This is something you will have to determine yourself and requires a bit of trial and error. Obviously placing the hive where there is known bee activity is important. The best way to get a swarm is to place your swarm traps in an area where you know that bees are being managed. If you know of a tree or structure where bees have swarmed prior this may be a good spot to locate your trap.

## *Finding a Location for a Swarm Trap*

This could be near a beekeepers yard or feral hive of bees or even on your own yard. Once you find a spot you like, you will want to place the hive at least 10-15 feet off the ground. Basically you want the hive at the flying height of the scout bees. I don't know what the flying height is so I place them as high as I can while still being able to take it down safely. Experimenting and learning from failures is the key to successful swarm trapping.

## *Finding a Location for a Swarm Trap*

You will soon find that there are places you always catch swarms and places you never catch swarms. Having several swarm traps out increases your odds, so get as many traps out as possible. If you have a hive box laying around put some frames in it, bait it with lemongrass oil and set it out during swarm season. This is better than letting it sit in your garage.

## *Finding a Location for a Swarm Trap*

Swarm trapping is a great way to get started in beekeeping. It isn't the easiest way to get bees but the knowledge attained while doing it is worth the extra effort. Besides, who doesn't like free bees? This will also be useful in catching a swarm that contains your \$25 queen you installed last year.

Transfer the swarm into a hive body of your choice and size of the box wither 8 or 10 frame.

If you are using a top bar trap it is only for top bar hives. Neither is interchangeable.

Give them a feeder of 1 to 1 sugar water to aid them in draw out new comb.

# Hogan Trap out box



## Swarm prevention

We all know how the old saying goes “ **an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure**” .

Checking your hives every 10 days during the early spring prior to a full nectar flow may save you a lost swarm.

Looking for overcrowding and making splits should prevent a swarm from occurring.

# Swarm prevention

Finding queen cells early and making a split moving the queen into the split and leaving at least 2 cells should fool the bees into thinking they have already swarmed.

If the queen is still laying eggs you may have prevented a swarm. If she is failing they may be trying to supersede her.

## Swarm prevention

Even if they are trying to supersede her you can leave the cell, move her and see if you need to replace her. You can replace her at a later date.

Always put a entrance reducer in place to allow them to protect themselves.

**Remember there are not**  
**absolutes in beekeeping.**

## Swarm prevention

The other option is to add equipment. The only draw back, this is only a Band-Aid solution. You will have to deal with this solution at a later date.

Also you may lessen the strength of your hive in the process as they will be busy pulling wax in the new box.

Checker boarding a hive I have found to be useful in this situation. If done early enough in the season it may come back strong.

## Splitting a hive

There are many ways to split a hive. For nuc production it is usually 3 broods and a food with a frame of foundation. The foundation is to give them something to do while the queen is getting established.

If you are doing a split to increase your own yard you can make it as strong as you wish, as long as you do not pull them down too much causing them not to be able to make honey for you.

## Splitting a hive

If you choose to checker board your hive you may at a later date split off the top hive bodies making a new hive from it.

You will need a new queen for one of the boxes.

If you do a split like this you will have to move it 3 miles at the least and add a new queen.

## Splitting a hive

A doolittle split is one in which you remove 4 frames from the mother hive one at a time.

You will shake all the bees back into the mother hive. This will assure that you do not pick up the queen in the split.

You place each of the frame in another hive body and put new frames in the mother hive. You put the winter super back into place and add a queen excluder. The hive body with the 4 frames should be place on top allowing the nurse bees to come up and cover the brood.

## Splitting a hive

Leave the hive for about 6 hours or enough time for the nurse bees to fully populate the box.

The box can be removed and placed on a bottom board and made into a new hive.

This split can be placed on the original yard but away from the mother hive.

A lost swarm is lost money and resources. **Never take away from a hive more than you leave.**

Good luck in 2016