

Add another super?

Supering strategies change depending on what it is that you are after and the things that you have to work with. Generally speaking the more supers than you have on at the beginning of the flow the more honey you will get. The reason for this is that the bees need a tremendous amount of storage space when the nectar is flowing.

The principles are this: Let's say all of your honey crop comes in on one day. Your crop will fill 2 supers of honey which would be a nice harvest at the end of the year. Now remember that unless the bees are robbing someone else's hives they are bringing in nectar. This has to be reduced to honey by evaporating the excess water. Perhaps 75% of what they bring in has to be evaporated in order to turn it into good ripe honey. This means that instead

of 2 supers to hold all this nectar you will need 8 of them! Fortunately our honey does not come in all in one day but with the preceding example you can see the principles involved.

The faster and more intense the flow is the more space you need for the nectar. When you have drawn comb the rule of thumb is super early with lots of them... before the flow.

Bare foundation is a different story. Those go on one at a time. There is no advantage in providing extra foundation to catch the nectar flow because the bees have yet to make comb to put their cargo in.

In general add drawn comb all at once and foundation one at a time.

Steve

Caging the Queen

I have been getting quite a few calls about caging the queen. I thought that it might be a good idea to put down on paper my thoughts on when, why, and how it is done. Keep in mind that there are many ways to keep bees and caging the queen is by no means the one best method of managing your colonies. Here are a few reasons to cage the queen:

Swarm control: Once the queen is taken out of the egg laying process she can't lay in those pesky cells that hang on the bottom bar and around the sides of the comb.

Decrease in hatching bees in the honey house: In my opinion this is a great advantage, particularly if you use the porch or inside the house for your extracting. If you cage 21 days before the harvest most everything will be hatched out except for a few drones.

More room for honey and nectar in the supers: Bees need extra space to put the incoming

nectar. As the bees hatch out there is an extra cell available to fill.

Fewer mouths to feed during the nectar flow: I have heard it said that it takes a frame of honey to make a frame of brood. I don't know if this ratio is an exact one or not, but if it is close to being true, it amounts to a fair bit of honey. I have 8 to 10 full frames of brood in my hives at this moment.

A higher proportion of honey producing bees: Bees will go to work in whatever job needs to be done. In the normal operation of things in the hive the young bees spend their time raising the next batch of brood. With no brood to raise, these bees simply go on to the next step.

On the down side:

Loss of brood production: This results in a hive full of older bees, and is not what you want to go into winter with. I have not done any

comparisons, but I would be willing to bet that given two hives, the one that had the queen in full production for as long as she wanted to lay eggs would winter better than the one that had the brood cycle interrupted.

Decrease in wax production: Young bees that are a couple of weeks old have active wax glands. If you want to draw comb after harvest, then these are the bees that you want.

Time involved: Looking for the queens can be a fairly time consuming process if you have more than a few hives.

Emergency queen cells form when the queen's presence is reduced: These cells are harder to find because they are anywhere there is a new egg or a very young larva, and not just confined to the edges or the bottom of the super.

How to do it:

There are several ways to cage the queen and all of them involve finding her. We covered this in one of the newsletters a short while back, so I won't go into it here again. Once she is found she has to be either picked up with your fingers or with a queen catcher that is sold in most beekeeping catalogs. Fingers are free and she won't sting... The queen can be put back into her shipping cage and hung back into the hive as though she is being introduced to the hive. This may require removal of one of the wall frames and reducing the frames to 9. Likely the wall frame is full of honey at this time so it is good for the table. It makes it easier for the uncapping later anyway. You can also make a larger but thinner cage out of screen and hang it between the frames without pulling one out. A pair of excluders will trap a queen inside a super. If you move the frames of honey with her there is much less room for her to lay eggs.

Be sure to hang the queen near the middle of the brood nest and with the youngest brood and eggs. Her pheromone will reduce the number of emergency queen cells that are formed when she

can't circulate. This year I placed the queens in a divided super so that each has 4 frames to work with. This is much like how I started my double queen hives and still keeps the brood going but confined to one area. We will see how that works...

Steve

