

Harvest Methods

Even though it is past time to take off the supers of honey, I thought that I would include in this month's newsletter some methods that are used for getting those supers away from the bees. I have used a number of them and some I have read about in various places. My favorite place of research is the archives of the Bee-L list so if you are looking for more information on a method you will likely find it on: <http://listserv.albany.edu:8080/archives/bee-l.html> I think that most beekeepers in the area use a bee brush to get the bees off the frames of honey. It is a pretty straightforward method of holding each frame up and brushing the bees back into the hive. Even though it is simplistic there are always a few things that can be done to make the job more pleasant. I have found that the times that I have used this method I have had the least amount of stings if I move the hive first. Every super that I intend to take home with me I move to a new location about 2 or 3 steps away. If I am taking the whole hive I work the brood chamber first into a super of bare foundation that is located in the old hive spot. It is nice to have the queen in the hive with the first batch of bees so that you don't have to wonder where she is. There are less bees flying during the first frames that are shaken and you have more of a chance to spot the queen. I use a shake and brush method and end up handling the frames twice. It involves using an extra super and walking in a tight circle but I think that it saves time in the long run. Move the supers that you want to harvest to a stack a several feet from corner of the hive that you will be harvesting from. Have an empty super of the appropriate size located several feet from the other corner so that the supers form a triangle. You will be working in the middle of the triangle. I work right in front of the hive though it may not make any difference in a practical sense. I want the bees to be in their familiar flight path so that they go to the hive instead of back to the stack of supers. I place the super full of bees on a deboxer and separate the frames from each other so that they are not all stuck together and easy to grab. I use a pair of needle nose pliers as a pointed wedge to pop the frames apart. It is faster than a hive tool and will not squish any bees; just a straight downward push will wedge the frames apart smoothly. The process is really pretty straightforward: grab a frame by the frame rests and move it over the hive, give it a few quick shakes and most of the bees will fall off. Set the frame into the new box and repeat the procedure until all the frames are shaken off. Once the box is full take the

now empty super and use it to hold the frames after they have been brushed off with a bee brush. I relocate the new box about a step further away from the box of frames that have just been shaken. I pick up a frame by the center of the top bar and use the brush to brush the bees toward either end bar or brush them up toward the top bar. It takes less strokes of the brush if you brush toward the sides or toward the top bar because of the way the comb slants. I brush both sides before I turn around to place the frame into the going home box. Most of the bees won't follow the comb when you turn around. The inner cover with a piece of tape over the hole makes a good lid to keep bees from getting back onto the combs.

Another method I have used to move bees off the combs is using air power. A bee blower is pretty much the same thing as a leaf blower. The theory is that a good stream of air will blow the bees off the comb and they will fly back to the hive. Bees are used to the wind and as long as they are not blown into a solid object they will not suffer for the experience. Here are a few tips that I have used in blowing bees off the comb. The space at the bottom of the frame is larger than the space between the top bars of the frame. This means that you should blow the bees down from the top bars and out the bottom of the super. Tipping the super onto its end helps. I have had the most luck in moving bees with air power if you can catch them off guard. This means moving the nozzle of the blower back and forth over the area. Once the bee gets a chance to hang onto the comb it takes a hurricane to get them off. It is the gust of wind that gets them removed. I abandoned my bee blower in exchange for an air compressor with 50 feet of hose. I think that it works much better and I can get a quick blast with the standard blower valve by the press of a thumb. The stream of air is narrow enough that I can direct it between the frames without involving the space between the frames next to it. I can also use the air like a brush if I want to do each frame individually. Problems with using air to move bees is that the air flowing over the supers of honey really alerts the bees downwind and I have noticed that there has seemed to be more of a tendency for robbing to start up.

This year I tried out a triangle escape board and can see the great potential that it has. Unfortunately I tried it late in the harvest so that my sample size for the test was rather limited. I put a stack of supers on a pallet and topped it with one of these devices as I worked the rest of the yard. After a few hours I looked under the escape board and discovered that there were only about a half dozen bees left in the stack. For those that don't know what a triangle escape board is (sometimes called a clearer board), it is not much more than an inner cover with a few slats of wood that form a triangle on

one side of the board. The three pieces of wood do not touch at the tips of the triangle but instead make a passage way about 3/8 of an inch wide and an inch long that a bee can walk through. This triangle is inside another triangle of the same design (only larger) and the entire thing is covered with screen. The bees can go through the hole in the inner cover and find themselves inside a screen-covered triangle. They can leave this triangle at the corners and find themselves inside the second triangle, which they can also exit at the corners. For some reason they can't seem to find their way back into the center the way they came out, but instead try to go straight back through the screen at the center. The triangle escape board works under the same principle as the bee escape, allowing the bees to go one way and preventing the return to the supers.

Most of the times I have seen escape boards or bee escapes used they are in conjunction with fume boards. The use of a fume board is said to speed the process along giving an incentive for the bees to leave the area. For those that have never smelled the bee repellent that is used on a fume board take my word for it – it stinks! I have never used the stuff but have some in a container in the garage to do some experiments with. It was shipped in its own container within another container and the odor still went through with enough power to stink up the garage. I had to wrap it in two layers of aluminum foil just to keep it inside. I would imagine that the bees would leave the area rather quickly as they are reported to do. My concern would be that it would be another chemical that would potentially end up in the honey.

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