

Splitting a Managed Honey Bee Colony

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Reasons to split

- Prevent swarming
- Maintain smaller, more accessible colonies
- Expand the number of colonies in your apiary
- Weaken a mean colony

When to split a colony

Colony splits should ideally be done in the spring during a nectar flow when plenty of blooming forage plants are available. This is when colonies are normally increasing their populations and are likely to swarm. Splitting during a nectar flow also decreases the need to feed bees.

The colony to be split should ideally have:

- At least four frames of brood/eggs
- At least four frames of honey/pollen
- A healthy queen

<i>Parent colony before split</i>
Honey/Pollen
Honey/Pollen
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Honey/Pollen
Honey/Pollen

How to split a colony

There are many methods of splitting colonies, depending on preference and management objectives. This is one method of doing a colony split that requires 2-3 days and the following additional equipment:

- 1 New mated queen (you should obtain the queen on the second or third day)
- A new location for the split (it can be in the same bee yard)
- 1 empty, deep, brood super with ten frames
- 1 hive bottom board
- 1 Hive cover
- 1 Queen excluder
- 2 Feeders (maybe)
- 2 Entrance reducers

Remove from colony and put into an empty brood super:

- 2 - 3 frames of capped brood/eggs
- 1 - 2 frames of honey/pollen

As you remove each frame, look for the queen. (If you find her, you can catch her and replace her in the original super once you have finished removing frames.) Until you find the queen, shake bees from each frame you remove back into original hive box to ensure you aren't removing the queen. Remove any queen cells from frames you put into the new super.



- Replace spaces in original colony with empty frames.
- Place queen excluder on top of the original colony.
- Place brood super with the 5 frames in it on top of the queen excluder.
- Fill in frame spaces in new empty brood super with empty frames.
- Replace cover(s).

<i>Parent colony after split</i>
Foundation
Foundation
Honey/Pollen
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Honey/Pollen
Foundation
Foundation
Foundation

<i>New colony after split</i>
Foundation
Foundation
Honey/Pollen
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Brood/Eggs
Honey/Pollen
Foundation
Foundation
Foundation

- If either colony is left with less than 2 frames of honey, then plan to feed it sugar water when the colonies are divided.
- Leave hive for at least 24 hours (up to 2 days). Worker bees will move up into the top box.
- Have additional bottom board and cover in the new location ready for the new colony. Remove top super with worker bees from original colony and place in new location.
- Place cage with new queen into new colony.
- In two days, check to make sure queen escaped from cage (remove “candy” and let her out if not).
- In two weeks, check new colony for eggs.

Resources

- <http://scientificbeekeeping.com/understanding-colony-buildup-and-decline-part-7b/>
- Swarm Control for Management Beehives <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/IN/IN97000.pdf>