Ways to Get Bees

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Acknowledgements

- Developed by Karla Eisen with input from John Strecker & Keith Fletcher
- Photos are credited to Karla Eisen, Bob Reikowski, Mike Kestner, Keith Fletcher, & Dave Wright
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Ways to Get Bees
Buy, Make, Catch or Trap

- Packaged Bees
- Nucs (Nucleus Colonies)
- Swarms
- Cut Outs & Trap Outs

Packaged Bees

- Most Produced in GA/CA
- Most come in a 3 lb. box
- Bees shaken into pkg. from other colonies
- Queen placed in a separate cage inside box
- Sugar Syrup feed in a can
- To Install-
  - Bees shaken into hive
  - Queen cage placed - bees release her in a few days

Packaging Bees

Packaged Bees
What works well

- Available early in season
- “Usually” arrive close to schedule
- Moderate cost (+/- $90/$115)
- Can build up well started on new foundation with sugar syrup feed
- Able to watch colony build up from scratch
- Fun and easy to install
- Some see as less intimidating to install (than nucs)
- Requeening later in season

Packaged Bees
Potential Challenges

- Queens are mass produced, mated early in season, & untested
- Higher incidence of laying workers & drone laying queens
- Higher Queen Supercedure (replacement)
  - *POPULATION INBALANCE. Packaged bees have no new bees for minimum of 21 days*

- Weather can be cold/rain/snow when package installed in Mid Atlantic region *(= poor foraging, lack of nectar & pollen*)
- Winter survival likely inferior to colonies started from nucs & from more regionally produced queen stock and/or hygenic stock
- Produced in areas w/ higher incidence of small hive beetle
- Queens produced closer to Africanized genetics

Nucs (Nucleus Hives)

- **A mini colony**
  - Generally 4-5 frames of brood, larvae, pollen, honey, drawn comb or foundation, bees, & a *laying queen*
- VA State law requires apiary inspection before sale
- Must pick up nuc (no shipping)
- Nuc Frames are installed into full size hive equipment (usually done at your apiary but not always)
- Cost varies ($165- $195)

NUCS- Types of Nucs

- **Local Spring Nucs** – ***Made with the Beekeeper's local bees***
  - *Produced in Spring by from frames out of existing colonies & installing new Queen.*
  - *Queens are EITHER new local/regionally reared queens or purchased queens usually from the South (GA/FL/MS), or CA, TX or HI.*
- **Snow Bird Nucs** - bees wintered in the South; split in Spring with a new queen (usually from the South, CA, or HI) & brought up "North"
- **Southern Nucs**- Made from bees in the South & brought up "North" for sale
- **Post Pollination Spring Nucs** - bees back from pollination (usually CA almonds but could be apples locally) & split into nucs with a new spring queen (usually from the South (GA/FL/MS), or CA, TX or HI)
- **Packaged Bees Nucs**- packaged bees hived in a nuc box
- **Over-Wintered Nucs**- produced in the prior summer & overwintered in our area – the queen is "tested" in that she survived winter. Queen source varies.

Nucs- What works well

- Organic unit- bees & laying queen are functioning together
- Expand rapidly- Nucs catch up & often out produce packaged bees
- Less chance of early supercedure, laying workers or drone laying queen
- Available regionally- ability to know producer
- Winter survival generally better
- Many producers are club members (more accountability)

Nucs- Potential Challenges

- Different standards (# of frames, quality, etc.)
- Can be more prone to swarm especially when installed on foundation (especially overwintered nucs)
- Greater possibility of disease spread
- Most Spring nucs use commercial queens (check queen source)

Nucleus “Nuc” Hives

Transporting Nucs

waxed cardboard

nuc transfer box

5 empty frames

5 “nuc” frames

Nucs- Important Stuff to Know *Before* Buying

- Specify **SIZE**- DEEP or MEDIUM frames?
- How many frames of brood, honey/pollen in the nuc?
- Does the seller want a “Frame Exchange”?
- Transporting the nuc home - How? (*Cardboard nuc box, in your hive body, etc*.)
- Is there a healthy Laying Queen? (*nucs should have evidence of queen laying- NOT a caged queen*)
- Queen Source? (*where produced, genetic traits such as hygienic*)
- Nucs expand rapidly- you **must** have full size equipment ready
- Be Knowledgeable of what you are buying

Nuc Pick Up Considerations

- Bees fly when there is light
  - Be prepared to pick up nuc very early or late in the day
- Bees generate a lot of heat (90 +)
  - Fill up gas before you show up. Go directly home after pick up. Do not plan multiple errands with a nuc in the back seat (increasingly important in late Spring and summer)
  - Transport boxes can be opened to let bees fly (place box where colony will be)

Swarms

- Swarms are the naturally occurring way that honeybees reproduce
- Hive raises a new queen- and then half of the hive leaves usually with the old queen
- “After swarms” occur with mated and unmated (virgin) queens

Swarms

Swarms

- **WHAT'S GOOD**
- Free
- Usually develop (and draw out comb) fast
- Usually very gentle to capture
- Fun and exciting to see and catch

- **CHALLENGES**
- Unknown queen genetics
- May have unmated/ virgin queen
- Potential to abscond
- Can be risky to catch
- Unknown Availability

Cut Outs and Trap Outs

- Existing bee hives that exist in homes, walls, trees, and other structures
- Must be physically cut out or trapped out- Removed from their home and placed into frames and hives

Cut Outs and Trap Outs

Cut Outs & Trap Outs

- Free
- Established hive, organic unit of bees, brood and queen

- Unknown queen genetics
- May not get queen
- Potential to abscond
- Bees can be defensive during cut out
- Can be difficult to obtain, time consuming, & require special tools & carpentry skills
- Unknown Availability

Remember ALL Colonies Can Fail
Common Reasons for Failure

- Queen superseded delaying normal colony development
- Queen is unmated or poorly mated (poor laying, drone layer, laying workers)
- Poor foraging weather or inability to use feeder/Starvation
- Queen balled due to excessive disturbance (from beekeeper) in first 10 days (especially in packages)
- Bees Diseased
- Bees Abscond
- Queen stress or injury during shipment or placement resulting in diminished egg laying or pheromone production

(modified from Sammataro, Beekeepers Handbook 4th Edition. p. 84)

Resources

Installing a Nuc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2C5zUnINDA

Installing a Package

PWRBA Nuc Program

https://pwrbeekeepers.com/events-programs/nuc-program/

PWRBA Nuc Guidelines

https://pwrbeekeepers.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PWRBA-2019-Nuc-Guidelines.pdf