

Spring Management

- Inspect the hive interior briefly on a sunny day, when the temperature at the hive entrance reaches 50 degrees F. Look for brood, honey and pollen stores. If all are present, the colony is fundamentally sound. Do not disrupt the brood sphere; replace frames precisely as found to avoid chilling brood.
- Close up or bring in any “deadouts” to prevent robbing and spread of disease. Seek to determine the cause of mortality.
- Observe the hive exterior for signs of stress, such as nosema streaks and weakened bees. Dead bees below the entrance board are normal.
- Check food stores in cold weather by lifting the back of the bottom board off the stand a couple of inches. It should feel heavy.
- Emergency feeding is needed if the colony is light on honey stores. Feed stored honey frames, sugar paste, mush, or hard candy.

Reducing an Over-Wintered Two-Story Colony to a Single Story before Spring

- Reinstalling the colony in a single hive body after mid-February will
 - 1) stimulate brood production for increase, and
 - 2) help prevent swarming.
- Perform this manipulation on a calm, sunny day, when the temperature is above 55 degrees F at the hive entrance, and the bees are gathering pollen. Typically, you will find the cluster in the upper hive body below the hole in the inner cover, and no bees in the lower hive body.
- Remove the over wintered hive bodies from the bottom board and set them to the side on an inverted outer cover. Scrape or shake the loose debris from the bottom board. Place an empty hive body on the bottom board, using a spare, or using the lower story over-wintered hive body, after removing the frames.
- Remove the frames with the cluster from the over wintered upper hive body, and place them in the center of the hive body that is now on the bottom board. Do not disrupt the brood sphere. Install the brood frames in the same position, order and direction as they were in the upper hive body. Find two good frames of empty comb (usually found in the bottom hive body you removed) and place them beside the outermost brood frames on each side of the cluster. Add pollen frames beside each of the open frames, and frames full of honey beside the pollen.
- Remove the extra hive body and frames to a work area for inspection. Cull and replace the frames that have excess drone cells, or are damaged, and scrape off excess propolis and wax from the better frames you plan to reuse. Replace one-third of the frames annually in order to reduce chemical residues in the comb. Arrange these frames in a hive body that will be ready to place on the single hive body when it is almost full of bees (2-4 weeks, depending on weather). Alternatively, make up a second story of open frames in the field, and place it above the inner cover above the newly made up brood chamber. The queen and cluster will not move up through the inner cover. The second story will be in place for expansion when the lower brood chamber fills out.
- This method stimulates brood production for increase, and provides an empty hive body for expansion before the honey flow, helping to prevent swarming.