

It's Time To... Prepare for Spring

January 18, 2016

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Happy New Year...

Dates in this email

Dates are for the Atlanta, Georgia area. To help convert to your season the following dates are for a typical Atlanta spring. Dandelions blossom in early March. Apples blossom during the first week of April. Deciduous trees leaf out and the average last frost day is April 12. These spring events can vary up to two weeks either way depending on the weather. This winter has been very unusual, for example, it was 60F on January 14 and I found many dandelions blossoming in one of my beeyards.

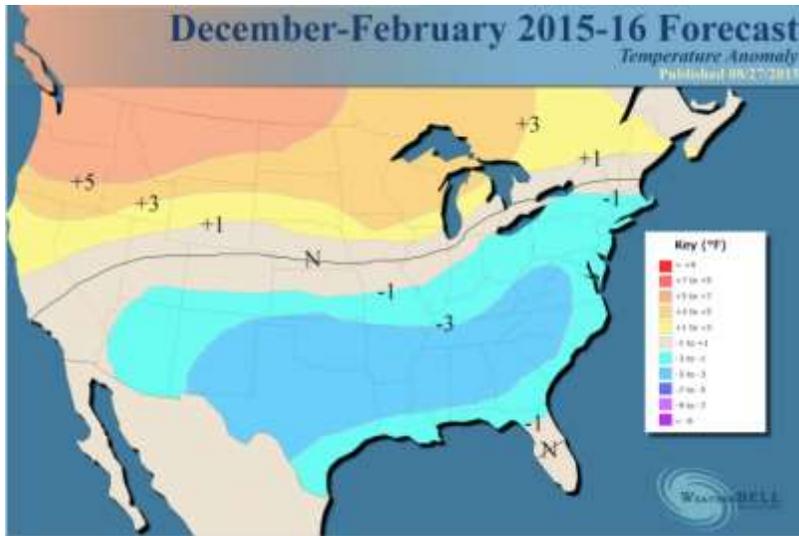
Statistical data collection

This year we start collecting data including, summer queen colony winter survival and total colony survival over winter. Our goal is to reduce winter losses to 10%. Raising your own queens from survivor colonies will reduce winter losses.

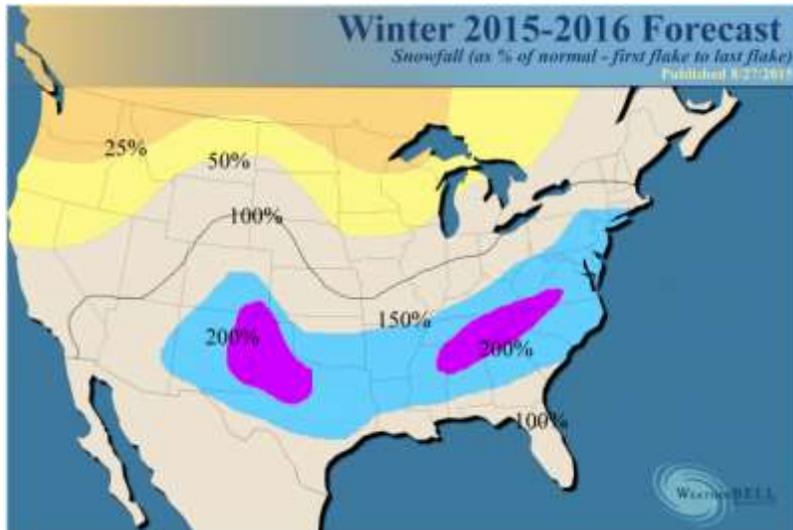
Weather

We have had many warm days since November 1, but weather systems are changing now with a southern storm track developing. The weather is turning colder and snowier now in the southeast USA. Atlanta was 75F on Christmas day but now we will experience many below normal days.

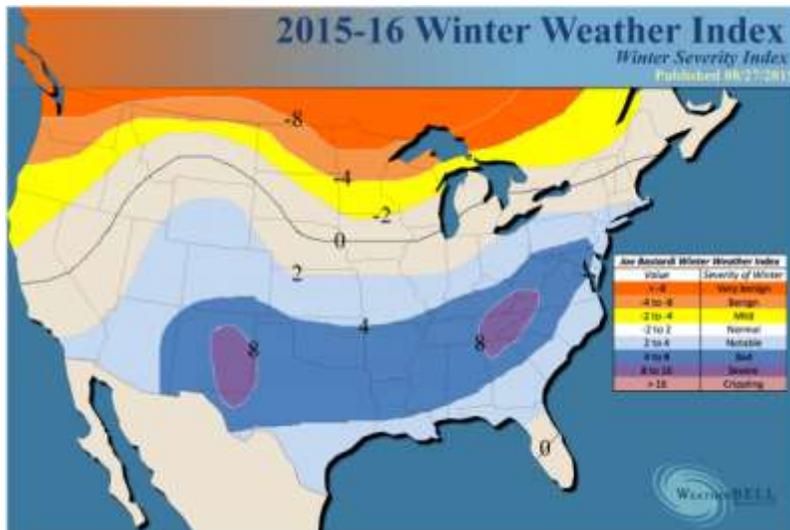
Temperature outlook compared to normal
(Weather charts courtesy weatherbell.com)



Snowfall compared to normal



Severity index



[More information on the winter outlook.](#)

The winter weather will diminish as we approach spring. Average temperatures bottom out in late January and start to rise in February. The sun always wins with warmer and sunnier days in March and April.

Dead Colonies

If you keep bees, colonies will die. It has always been that way. If all your colonies survive a winter consider yourself lucky.

Clean up a dead colony as soon as you find it, the task will only get worse later. Save honey, comb and any other resources the hive contains. Letting other colonies rob out a dead colony later on a warm day prevents you from using honey to feed a weak hive that needs it now.

Feeding Colonies

After feeding as needed in fall to assure ample honey stores by the end of October

Most of the honey that was in a hive on November 1 should still be in a colony on February 1. Warm winters enable more colony activity resulting in more honey consumption; conversely cold winters reduce honey consumption prior to February 1. This year some queens did not stop laying due to the warm November and December weather. Typically queens start to lay in early January. As brood rearing increases the larger brood area must be incubated at 93F requiring an increase in honey consumption.

Inspect early

Inspect your colonies early in the season. Late January or early February is best. Pick a day with a high temperature of 60F or warmer. I do inspect during colder weather but spend only a few minutes in the

hive. Inspect during mid-day allowing the colony to recluster prior to late afternoon cooling. Low or no wind is best; the warm air in the hive will be pulled out by a breeze blowing over the top when the cover is off. Any frame with brood is immediately returned to the super to keep the brood warm.

If you wait until later to inspect as warmer weather arrives you may miss the colony that can be saved from starving by feeding. You may see robbing activity on a warm day and think the colony is fine. Later with no activity at the entrance an inspection will reveal the colony has died.

Any overwintered nuc will need to be fed early. Don't let you nucs starve.

What to look for

Brood

Any brood means there is a viable queen present. The queen will lay in batches initially. Don't spend any extra time looking for eggs. Chilling the brood will kill it.

Honey

How much honey remains? The most important task early in the year is to check honey stores and prevent starvation. Don't let you colonies starve. Feed them if they are low on honey. Don't feed them if they don't need to be fed. If you fed enough last fall they should have enough now. Feeding now when they don't need to be fed will help them build up very strong enabling them to swarm.

If they had a shallow super of honey on the hive last November 1 most if it should still be there on February 1. In a 10 frame shallow super I would expect to find about 8 frames of honey left. If there are less than 6 shallow frames of honey it's time to feed.

Feeding during cold weather in late winter.

A Boardman feeder will not work in the entrance. Cold syrup far from the cluster will not be consumed by the colony. It needs to be right above the cluster. A hive top feeder will work with warmer temperatures in February. Boardman feeders work well setting on the top frames of the top super. Four Boardman feeders will fit. An empty deep super setting on the hive will leave enough space for the feeders.

Feed fast and only for a short period. This will reduce swarming potential. For a hive with only 3 shallow frames of honey on February 1 they need one to one and a half gallons of syrup. Use a feeder that enables them to consume the syrup quickly so they store it not just consume it. Then take the feeder off.

If the weather is very cold the best method is the Mountain Camp method using a piece of newspaper, a shim or empty super and granulated sugar.

[Mountain Camp Method \(cold weather feeding\)](#)

[Mountain Camp Method VIDEO](#)

Honey consumption increases as the colony raises more brood growing the worker population in preparation to swarm just prior to the main nectar flow. At the same time each warm spell provides nectar and pollen for the foragers to collect. The warm spells increase in duration as we approach the last frost date

The next It's Time To.... will be emailed about February 1.

Two methods of swarm prevention will be explained. Nectar management can be used with plenty of empty drawn comb available otherwise a split with the queen can prevent swarming. The Nectar Management manipulation of the hive is performed about two months prior to deciduous tree leaf out. In the [Piedmont of Georgia](#) it needs to be done in early February. The split with the queen is done one week prior to swarm season.