

It's time to... Reduce Swarming and Increase Honey Production

If you want to increase honey production continue reading.

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Honey production requires swarm prevention.
More honey, more money, more success.

Every colony's goal is to swarm every spring just prior to the main nectar flow. This has nothing to do with [congestion](#) or crowding of the hive. It is procreation.

When a colony produces a swarm about 70% of the workers leave with the queen. A colony that produces a swarm will produce much less honey compared to a colony that does not swarm.

Requirements and Timing

Nectar management requires three or more shallow supers of empty drawn comb for each hive. The nectar management manipulation is performed about two months prior to deciduous tree leaf out. In the Atlanta area this is early February.

Another option, when less than three supers of empty drawn comb are available per hive, make a split with the queen one week prior to swarm season to prevent swarming. In the Atlanta area this is about March 13. This varies depending on whether spring is early or late. An **It's Time to...** will be sent about March 1 with details on making a split to prevent swarming.

Nectar Management, developed by [Walt Wright](#)

Three or more empty shallow supers of drawn comb are needed to manipulate a hive. Weather is not much of a factor because the cluster is not disturbed and it only takes about 5 minutes to complete. A temperature above 40° F (4°C) with no rain is best.

In this example the hive consists of a ten frame deep with the cluster and a shallow super of honey above. This will work on 8 frame hives or medium supers of honey too. Two shallow supers of empty drawn comb are brought to the beeyard from storage.



The hive before nectar management. Two supers of empty drawn comb on the right.

The Nectar Management manipulation is completed two months prior to deciduous tree leaf out. Start by moving the deep super to the bottom board if it is not already there. The cluster is not disturbed in the deep enabling this to be done at temperatures too cold for an inspection.

Remove five frames of honey from the shallow super.



Honey super above deep. Frames are labeled for clarity. Unlabeled frames represent empty drawn comb frames.



Five frames of honey removed. (If you look close at the frames in these photos, they do not contain empty drawn comb. They are for manipulation demonstration only. **Empty drawn comb must be used.**)

Add 5 frames of empty drawn comb from the supers brought to the hive. Alternate honey and empty drawn comb frames.



Starting to alternate honey and empty drawn comb frames on the right side.



Alternating empty and honey frames



Bottom shallow super complete. Notice there is a honey frame on the left. The next super will need an

empty frame on the left.

The second shallow super is configured like the first using the remaining five frames of honey. The frames must alternate vertically too. In this example the bottom shallow has a honey frame on the left. In the second shallow super place an empty drawn comb frame on the left and continue to alternate honey and empty frames filling up the super.



The two supers contain 10 frames of honey and 10 frames of empty drawn comb. The frames alternate both horizontally and vertically in the two supers.

Add one more shallow super of empty drawn comb.



The Nectar Management manipulation is complete.

The hive now is configured with a deep and three shallow supers. The bottom two shallow supers have both empty drawn comb and honey frames. The honey cap has been broken up implying low honey stores when there is plenty. The empty drawn comb can be used for brood production and nectar storage.



Inspect the hive periodically and add additional supers of empty drawn comb if the workers are storing nectar in the top super. If they fill up the top super they will backfill the brood nest and swarm.

Nectar management works because the colony no longer has a honey cap enabling increased nectar storage and egg laying. [Backfilling](#) is prevented if additional supers of empty drawn comb are added as needed. This prevents the colony from attaining all the goals required to swarm. Meanwhile the queen lays prolifically enabling a large worker population resulting in a significant increase in honey production during the main nectar flow.

This is a perfect example, you may find something different.

You may find two or three frames of brood in the honey super with more brood in the deep. Keep the brood together in the same location. Place empty drawn comb adjacent the shallow frames of brood and continue to alternate honey and empty drawn frames.

You may find the deep empty with the cluster in the shallow super of honey. They probably need to be fed. If you have honey from a dead colony you can add frames of honey. This is the best reason to inspect early so you can use the resources of the dead colony. This colony may have starved if nothing was done until later in the spring. When this colony is stronger and warmer weather arrives (three or four weeks) move the deep above the cluster so they will move up into the deep with brood rearing. Later when the deep is full of brood it can be moved lower in the stack of supers. This may be delayed until queen rearing and splits are started.

Early in the year with small cluster size and cold weather follow these rules.

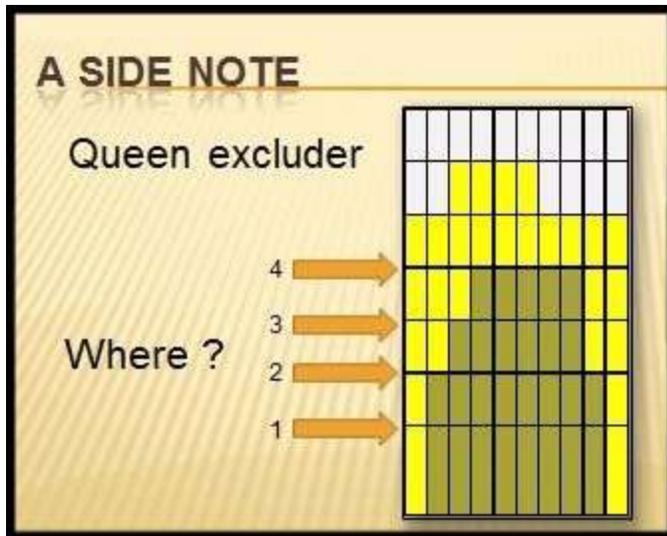
- Do not separate the brood from honey.
- Keep all the brood together

The strongest hives could end up with 8 shallow supers and over 100 pounds of honey.

When the colony starts making white wax (new wax) the colony has changed its goal to collect nectar and make honey.

Queen Excluders, if you use them...

At the beginning of the main nectar flow there could be a deep and three shallow supers of brood. If you use a queen excluder insert it high enough to enable the colony to continue to produce large numbers of brood.



Position 4 would be a good place for the queen excluder.

Yellow - honey, Olive - brood

Two articles by Walt Wright about queen excluders

[Deficiencies in Design of the Queen Excluder](#)

[The Reasons Why the Queen Excluder Limits Honey Production](#)

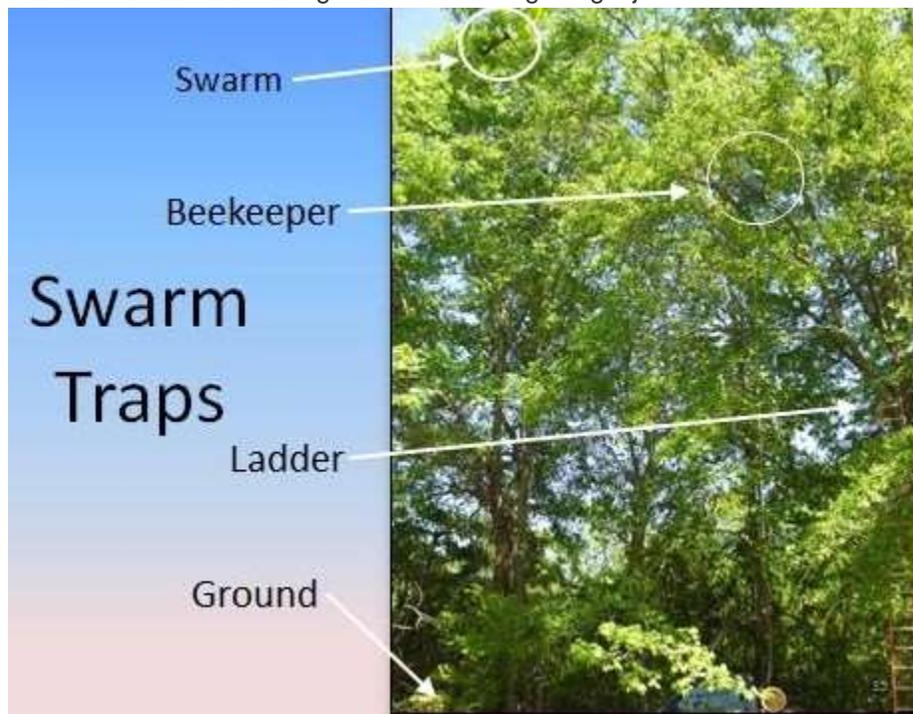
Coweta Beekeeping Method notes

- Enhance production hives prior to the main nectar flow as needed. A frame or two of brood from an overwintered nuc can strengthen a weak production hive.
- Don't make splits prior to the main nectar flow because removing frames of brood will reduce honey production. The one exception is to make a split with the queen to prevent swarming. This will result in more honey production compared to honey production from a colony that swarms. More on this in the March **It's Time to...**
- Inspect hives early to assess honey stores, strength, brood and queen.

Swarm Logic

1. Use techniques to prevent swarming
2. If a colony swarms and it is not dangerously high off the ground, catch the swarm.
3. If a swarm is too high to safely catch or you don't visit your hives every afternoon set up swarm traps to entice swarms to catch themselves. A swarm has moved into a swarm trap when workers are returning with pollen.

A swarm is not worth falling from a tree and getting injured or killed..



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