

Warre Hives

Swarm Control using Artificial swarming

Below is a compilation of information found on pages 98-101 of Beekeeping For All. Although much of the text has been changed to make it clear and to allow it to work for us here without illustrations, the procedures are maintained as Warré directed them to be performed. These procedures are intended to be used by beekeepers who are using conventional Warré hives.

Artificial swarming is a very efficient way of populating hives. Waiting for natural swarms is sometimes a long drawn out affair. In any case, such swarms are often lost and even if you do capture them, they cannot always be guaranteed to stay in the hive. Buying swarms is an expense that is not always cost efficient and does not always give bees of good quality.

The best time to perform artificial swarming is at the beginning of the main nectar flow when natural swarms start to be seen in the region. At this time the procedure is simpler and the mating of young queens is more effective. Should an artificial swarm be made from only one colony or two? One colony can certainly be successful. But it is always safer to use two, and if you can you should. We shall describe both methods. When doing splits, work on a fine day after a preceding fine day, and between 11am and 3pm, preferably at 11am. Always use strong colonies from which to make splits because big populations make the job easier and produce the best results.

Using a mated queen in artificial swarming is not only helpful, it is very helpful. You would be giving the new colony a head start. Furthermore, if you buy this queen from elsewhere you are bringing into your apiary new blood which often improves your stock. If you are uncertain of the reliability of the source of the queens that are available to you, do not buy a queen but rest content with those that your bees are raising themselves. Remember, also, that it is always good to feed all of the involved colonies for at least a few days after this procedure is performed.

Making a split using one colony

- 1. Choose a good, strong colony with which to make the split. This hive must consist of at least three boxes, although it's only necessary that the top two have comb (you can enlarge the hive just before making the split if you need to). This is hive 1.*
- 2. Place beside this hive, another hive, consisting of a floor and an empty (no bees) box with top bars. Prepare a screen and quilt to cover this hive. This is hive 2.*
- 3. Gently puff a little smoke into the entrance of hive 1 in order to calm the bees. Do not over-smoke! Over-smoking causes the bees and the queen to move to the top of the hive and prolongs the procedure. If your bees are particularly docile, this step may be skipped altogether.*

4. When the bees are humming, open the hive by lifting the quilt and the screen covering the top-bars. Smoke the colony vigorously by puffing smoke quickly between all of the top bars and well down into the top box.

5. After significant smoking, observe the number of bees remaining in the top box. Seeing a few bees here and there is fine, but if you notice bees balling you should drive them down with more smoking. The queen could be in one of these balls of bees. This may happen when working in conditions that are too cold, or after having smoked too much from below. When the bulk of the bees from the top box have gone down into the boxes below, remove the top box and place it on the top of hive 2.

6. Cover each hive with its own screen and quilt.

7. Carry hive 1 as far away within the apiary as possible. The further the better. A distance of only 6-10 feet may suffice if that is as far away as you can move it, but in this case it is good to put a few leafy branches between the two hives to clearly mark the separation and force the bees to make a detour when going from hive to hive.

8. Put hive 2 in place of hive 1.

9. If you wish to introduce a mated queen to hive 2, place the queen cage in the hive during the evening of the same day that you make the split. Uncork the candy end of the cage, but **DO NOT** make a tunnel through the candy. Placing the queen cage in the hive the same day you make the split should prevent the bees from making any queen cells. If you intend to let the bees make a queen, simply proceed to step 10.

10. Reduce the entrances of both hives to about one inch for a few days, until the bees' comings and goings are normal.

NOTES: *Hive one loses much of its brood and adult bees, but retains its queen. If you do this at the beginning of the main nectar flow, and if, in autumn, you left only the necessary stores in hive 1, then there will certainly be brood in the top box with which the bees in hive 2 can raise a new queen. The returning foragers from hive 1 will quickly populate hive 2, as well as will many bees that leave hive 1 after it is moved and then return to hive 2.*

Making a Split Using Two Colonies

1. Choose two good, strong colonies with which to make the split. One hive must consist of at least three boxes, although it's only necessary that the top two have comb (you can enlarge the hive just before making the split if you need to). These are hives 1 and 2.

2. Hives 1 and 2 must be at least 10 feet apart. If not, place a few leafy branches between the two hives to clearly mark the separation and force the bees to make a detour to go from one hive to another.

3. Place beside hive 1, which consists of at least three boxes, another hive, consisting of a floor and an empty (no bees) box with top bars. Prepare a screen and quilt to cover this hive. This is hive 3.

4. Gently puff a little smoke into the entrance of hive 1 in order to calm the bees. Do not over-smoke! Over-smoking causes the bees and the queen to move to the top of the hive and prolongs the procedure. If your bees are particularly docile, this step may be skipped altogether.

5. When the bees are humming, open the hive by lifting the quilt and the screen covering the top-bars. Smoke the colony vigorously by puffing smoke quickly between all of the top bars and well down into the top box.

6. After significant smoking, observe the number of bees remaining in the top box. Seeing a few bees here and there is fine, but if you notice bees balling you should drive them down with more smoking. The queen could be in one of these balls of bees. This may happen when working in conditions that are too cold, or after having smoked too much from below. When the bulk of the bees from the top box have gone down into the boxes below, remove the top box and place it on the top of hive 3.

7. Cover hives 1 and 3, each with its own screen and quilt.

8. Carry hive 2 as far away within the apiary as possible. The further the better. A distance of only 6-10 feet may suffice if that is as far away as you can move it, but in this case it is good to put a few leafy branches between hive 2 and the other hives to clearly mark the separation and force the bees to make a detour when going from hive to hive.

9. Put hive 3 in place of hive 2.

10. If you wish to introduce a mated queen to hive 3, place the queen cage in the hive during the evening of the same day that you make the split. Uncork the candy end of the cage, but DO NOT make a tunnel through the candy. Placing the queen cage in the hive the same day you make the split should prevent the bees from making any queen cells. If you intend to let the bees make a queen, simply proceed to step 11.

11. Reduce the entrances of all of the hives to about one inch for a few days, until the bees' comings and goings are normal.

NOTES:

Although hive 1 has lost much of its brood, it will retain its queen and all of its adult bee population.

If you do this at the beginning of the main nectar flow, and if, in autumn, you left only the necessary stores in hive 1, then there will certainly be brood in the top box with which the bees in hive 3 can raise a new queen. The returning foragers from hive 2 will quickly populate hive 3, as well as will many bees that leave hive 2 after it is moved and then return to hive 3.

Hive 2 loses only adult bees. It retains its queen and brood. Hives 1 and 2 may be used to make another split 2 weeks later, using hive 2 as hive 1 and hive 1 as hive 2.