

The Care and The Installation of Package Bees by Dana Stahlman

Package bees Made Easy 101-Lesson two

When should you get package bees?

Regardless of where you live, you should have them eight to ten weeks before the honey flow starts to gather a honey crop. This is usually around fruit bloom time and when dandelions are in bloom. Packages installed on drawn combs with combs of honey and pollen will build up faster.

We strongly feel that packages that arrive too early{ when there is no bee activity outside the hive} is going to result in poor hive development by inexperienced beekeepers. It is better a little late than too early.

Four important points:::

1. Use stimulative feeding The usual bee feed is sugar and water mixed in a ratio of 2 parts water to 1 part sugar. This is for spring feeding.
2. Keep entrances reduced to a small size. This prevents robbing and conserves heat.
3. Do not add supers or a second hive body until the bees fill the box below.
4. Expect some loss. Some beekeepers report as much as 20% supercedure and queen failure. Be sure to check the condition of the new hive on a weekly basis until the hive is well established.

Care of the package on Arrival:

If weather conditions are poor when the package arrives, you can hold the package for several day in a dark room or basement where the temperature is close to 50 degrees F. You should feed the bees in the package by either painting or sprinkling a mixture of sugar and water (50/50) on the screen of the cage and allow the bees to gorge themselves. You should repeat this process morning and night. If you do not do this, the sugar syrup in the can shipped with the package can go dry and your bees will starve. Bees die of heat quickly -- do not leave them in the sun or in a place that is hot.

Installation of Packages:

There are two or more systems for installing a package of bees. We recommend the following...

1) For the first time beekeeper.....

Install the package late in the afternoon. This helps prevent drifting. It is well to sprinkle or paint a little syrup on the screen of the cage 15 minutes before you are ready to move them to the hive for installation. This quiets them down and they will be better natured.

Remove five frames from your hive. Store the frames in a dry cool place. These frames will be put into your hive several days later. On the top side of the package cage, you will find a small square lid. Remove it. Under the lid is the top of the syrup can which has been used to feed your bees during transit from the bee yard to your home. Running off to one side you will see a piece of wire hanging out between the can and the hole in the top of the cage -- the queen cage is attached to this wire. Sometimes the queen cage is attached to a metal strip. Do not let this wire slip down into the cage! We recommend that you tip the cage up to about a 45% angle to remove the can from the cage. It is helpful to jar all the bees to the bottom of the cage when you do this. With a firm grip on the can, remove it, pull the queen cage out of the package and immediately return the can to the hole. This prevents the bees from getting out of the cage.

Now that the queen cage is removed, you have some time to study what you are going to do in the next step. Check the queen cage for a cork or plastic cap that prevents the bees from getting to the candy in the queen cage. You must remove this cork or plastic cap. The bees will release the queen from the cage by eating the candy (it usually takes a day or so for them to do it). We do not recommend that you poke a hole in the sugar of the small plastic cages that queens are shipped in. If the queen is in what is called the three hole benton queen cage, one of the holes is completely filled with sugar candy. It is helpful if you take a nail and make a hole in the candy in this cage.

Place the queen cage with the queen in it (Make sure she is alive) on the top of the five frames you have left in the hive body near where the package is going to go. The package will fit in the hive body in the space of the frames you have removed. It is sometimes recommended that you hang the queen cage between the frames where the bees are clustered. However, the bees are not clustered yet in your hive.

Placing the package in the hive:

It is now time to remove the can in the package of bees and sit it down into the hive body. We recommend that you partly remove the can (bees can not get out of the cage with the can still partly in the cage), set the package cage into the hive and then quickly remove the can all the way out. Place the inner cover over the hive upside down and place the syrup can over the hole in the inner cover. If you have an empty shallow box, place it on the inner cover to protect the syrup can. You can then close up your hive with the top cover. You will need to feed your bees

on a regular basis. You can use an entrance feeder or a bucket set over the hole in your inner cover. There are other types of feeders as well.

You will need to remove the package cage in a few days. You will want to make sure your queen has been released from her queen cage and during that inspection, you can pull the package cage out and replace the five frames you removed earlier. Don't get lazy. I have seen hives in which the beekeeper waited too long to remove the package cage. The bees will build comb in it, around it, and make getting the cage out at a later time difficult.

For Experienced Beekeepers:::

This is really an easy way to install a package and not nearly as frightening for the beginner as he/she might think. It has the advantage of getting it all over at once and eliminated any chance of burr comb being built in the package cage.

1. Follow all steps above except the removal of any frames from the hive.
2. Remove the queen cage as explained above and place it between the frames somewhere in the middle of the hive -- probably between the fifth and sixth frame.
3. Shake the bees to the bottom of the package cage and remove the syrup can. Shake the bees out of the package over the top of the frames and the queen cage. They will quickly move down into the hive. Place the inner cover on the top of the hive (don't crush any bees doing this). You may have to wait for the bees to go down into the hive for a short time.
4. Then follow the same instructions above about feeding and closing up the hive.

Special hints:

If you are an established beekeeper and can use drawn combs on which to install your package you should do so. If you can just give them two or three drawn combs it is a big advantage. This allows the bees to get to work without have to draw combs from the foundation first.

If you have a frame or two or three of honey and pollen , it is a decided advantage to the bees. You can and should still feed them syrup.

Bees will clean up old moldy comb. Some beekeepers throw away such frames. All you need to do is brush off any dead bees on the comb. They bees will do the rest.