

Mehalick Best Practices Beekeeping Calendar

This calendar is for my area, which is central Prince Georges County in Maryland. It was developed to help new beekeepers have a more successful beekeeping experience, and understand what the basic work with the hives should be. This calendar takes into account a single nectar flow starting in late April, ending in Early June. First swarms usually April 15th. We have tough bee conditions, and must adapt to them for local conditions.

Disclaimer: we follow 90% of the certified naturally grown guidelines. This means being proactive against varroa, using IPM methods such as drone pulls, screened bottom boards, freeman trays with diamoceous earth and regular monitoring before treating.

Create your action plan. Sit down and make a plan for how you would ideally handle your hives this year. This is ideal beekeeping. Life, work, family do not interfere. The weather is always wonderful, and the bees are always happy. This planning step will allow you to adequately plan your resources, money spending and time allocations. Set your goals for the year

With beekeeping you have to listen to the bees and adjust. Do not become regimented to the following date suggestions. They are suggestions/only guidelines, the bees will tell you what to do and when. Every year is different.

Keep records of your hives, using the system of your choice. Each hive inspection is worth a note of: whether the hive is queen right, presence of pests, brood/food state.

January

Check for food needs by popping the top and looking down the inner cover on any day over 45 Degrees. This is NOT a hive inspection, but a quick peek. Do not pull frames. If your bees are on the inner cover add FONDANT or a sugar block NOW on the frames directly above the cluster.

February

Check for food needs by popping the top and looking down the inner cover on any day over 45 Degrees. This is NOT a hive inspection, but a quick peek. If your bees are on the inner cover add FONDANT or a sugar block NOW on the frames directly above the cluster.

Start liquid 1:1 feed over the inner cover once days are regularly over 32 degrees. Keep in place until you super up for honey.

March

Mid-month- FIRST Full Spring inspection of your overwintered hive on a day when it is not windy or raining. Temperature is better over 50. Clean frames, check brood, and look at hive strength. Evaluate for varroa. Put in a new small hive beetle trap on the edge of the top box on the sunny side between frames 1 and 2.

Evaluate for Future Splits.

April

Now it is time to start the active beekeeping schedule

CALENDAR DEPENDENT SCHEDULE

1. Check varroa levels monthly. I prefer the alcohol wash. Any count over 5 mites per 100 bees needs treatment now.
2. Remove drone brood every 21 days, starting in Early April depending on your hive
3. Keep your water source filled and available
4. Keep a small hive beetle trap in the top box of your hive, on the sunny side, near the outside edge. We Also use Swiffer pads on the inner cover and tops of frames.
5. Keep 1:1 on your hive until your brood boxes have drawn frames. Then STOP feeding.
6. Use an interior feeder. Boardman feeders in the front entrance of the hive are ONLY FOR WATER

When your brood boxes have high populations, remove the split for the year. Books say 4/15. I have found that this is usually the first week in April for Italians, mid month for carniolians. Depends on the hive buildup. [Note that Italians can be ready to be split weeks before carniolians or russians.]

This is when I pull two frames per box that have aged out. If the 4/5 year old frames have brood or food, mark them for later removal and replacement.****

When the dandelion bloom hits, remove all 1:1 liquid feed, and SUPER UP with drawn frames. If you do not have drawn honey super frames, then add only one box at a time, using a follower board.

May-June

Consider hanging a wasp/hornet/moth trap near your hives. We make one with a two liter soda bottle using <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/waxmothtrap.html> It has been very effective.

Continue varroa checks and drone pulls. Check regularly for back filled brood nests. Tilt box up looking for swarm cells. The goal is to add real estate so the bees do not swarm, if you get behind then take a false swarm (split) and checkerboard in some drawn frames to give the queen some instant egg laying locations. Read Swarm Essentials by Steve Repasky for solid techniques.

Personally I do not like to make any splits after June 15th. Virgin Queens get back from mating flights on a much lower percentage due to hungry birds, dragonflies and hornets

We enter the dearth - ie. No large nectar sources beginning in mid/late June. The bees do not have incoming resources, and begin to become more defensive of their hives.

Add robbing screens now, if you do not already have them in place. Some see basswood flow in late June, I do not.

July

Mid month, check for capped honey.

Take your honey crop. Be sparing. We like to see 90% capped on the frames. If you have Italians leave 70-80 pounds on the hive.

Once honey crop is over, this is usually when I treat for varroa to get ready for making winter bees if the alcohol test counts show a need. This is a good time to consider taking out your current queen into a small split, leaving your main

hive queenless on purpose. This *OTS split will create queen cells, and have a temporary 3 week loss of brood which will knock down the varroa population. [The split will need to be fed until at nucleus colony strength for overwintering as an insurance policy against hive loss. At minimum keep the old queen until you are sure the new queen is as good in her laying pattern before squishing.] If this is done in early June, Bob Greenwell calls it a honey bomb. Once the bees make queen cells, they have nothing to do but cure the honey. The trick is finding the queen in a populous hive.

August

Bees naturally switch over to creating winter bees now, following nature's clues. Typically we start some 1:1 feed on low weight hives to get them strong for brood raising. This is particularly needed with Italian hives which do not shut down brood rearing during the dearth.

Final chance to requeen is August. This is when you decide how you want to progress. Do you want a newly mated purchased queen? Did you setup your own cell builder and raise queen cells from your favorite top producing hives? Did your OTS split result in a nice new queen for your production hives?

We have found summer virgins overwinter very well. Virgins that start in the spring, and work an entire season tend to swarm in the following spring right after overwintering.

September-October

By September switch to 2:1 if you are still feeding. The suggestion is to feed all at once, not trickle feed so the bees will store the feed, not use it for more brood.

In Late September, rearrange your hives to bring the brood all down into your bottom brood box. Bring all the brood together so the cluster starts together and is not forced to split cluster to cover brood. Honey stores go in the upper brood boxes.

Mouse guards go on. (Make sure the mice are not already in place)

This is the most dangerous period for re-infection with Varroa. Your strong hive, finds a dead out and brings it home. Be suspicious if your hive gets full of honey during this time. Our goldenrod flow is not that strong. Your robbing bees will be dead by spring if you do not treat again after they have become infected. This year we will be switching to varroa testing every two weeks during this time period.

Prepare your hives in late October for winter. Add a moisture quilt on the top. We have successfully used candy boards**. Candy boards have traditionally given us our personal best overwintering. Insulate if you are using it.

November-December

Use a hand held thermometer to track your cluster location without opening your hives. This will not work with insulated hives.

Clean and paint equipment. Dream of a wonderful honey flow next year.

“If you don’t have a Varroa Mitigation plan, you are planning to fail”

Dr. Dennis Van Engeldorp

Current varroa treatment recommendations from Dr. Dennis Van Engeldorp, as of 2/17/18 are:

Spring: Amitraz

Summer: Formic acid

Fall: Thymol, then trickle oxalic acid as needed

Bob Greenwell points out that the timing does not work for Maryland beekeepers because our high temperatures will not allow MAQS in the summer. Instead he recommends MAQS in the spring, Api Var after the honey supers are pulled, repeat MAQS in the fall as needed and OAV/OAD in the winter.

Personally, here at house Mehalick, we use regular drone pulls, and those have proven effective enough to reduce our need to treat until when the honey is pulled or even not until early fall. We do monitor our hives mite loads regularly, and monitor EACH hive, not a sampling.

*OTS splits- described by Mel Disselkoen as “The Ultimate, Chemical-Free Miticide”

** candy boards <https://www.beverlybees.com/i-want-candy-so-lets-make-a-candyboard-for-winter-feeding/> We do NOT use paper, absolutely do not add pollen and put about 5-10 pounds of sugar on each hive

*** my frames are marked by year the wax was made. I remove them on a four year schedule because I run 8 frame equipment (two frames per year are rotated out, usually in April) This is part of my regular hive maintenance. If you run 10 frame equipment, you can use a five year schedule.