

Guilford County Beekeepers Early Spring Splits

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Let me first say, “I am an Ohio transplant to North Carolina. I appreciate being invited to be here tonight.

My past experience in beekeeping has covered many roads and times. I have served as an officer in many bee organizations. I am an EAS Master Beekeeper- class of 1995. I was fortunate to know both John Ambrose and Bob Cole.

I was born into a commercial beekeeping family and as the oldest son learned beekeeping from the ground up. Commercial beekeeping is hard work. Success was measured by how much money the bees made in any bee season.

I am now a hobby beekeeper. I live in Raleigh and have the pleasure of working with three hives of bees. Beekeeping is fun but the bees no longer are running me, I am working with them.

I was asked to speak on Early Spring Increases.

**Responsible beekeeping requires
time and effort. When increases are
made, keep in mind that more cost
is involved as well as time!**

Getting Ready for the Bee Season

- Are Your Bees Alive?

One cannot make increases unless you have bees and hives to make increases.

I call these resources!

One can increase numbers of hives from one or two to hundreds. And there are many methods used to accomplish making more hives.

A little story about my move to North Carolina

I sold my beekeeping business in Ohio in 2015. I came to Raleigh that fall without a hive of bees.

I promised my wife that I would only have a hive or two in the back yard of our home!

In 2016 I bought new bee equipment for two hives and two packages of bees.

I have beekeeping in my blood!

By that fall I acquired some used equipment a person was selling. Enough equipment to make another 12 hives.

Gradually during the year I was the proud owner of 6 hives of bees. To make a long story short – By 2022 I had 30+ hives of bees.

I wasn't able to care for 30+ hives of bees!

North Carolina had a lot of 90+ degree days!

- I only have two arms, two legs, a limited amount of get up and go, and everything had to be handled by hand – no skid loader, no hired help and too many hives.
- **I now have three hives of bees and I am working on not getting bee fever this spring!**

So lets talk making hive increases

- It is easy to do!
- Generally speaking as hive numbers grow (less time can be spent with each hive).
- Each hive increase requires equipment.
- Each new hive takes up space.

If one has time, money for equipment and a place to locate new hives – one more question needs to be asked.

How does your family feel about less of your time?

Most beekeepers have a desire to grow hive numbers!

So here is how one can do it!



To make a split successfully one must start with a good strong hive of bees.

Timing is important

When should one make a split?

Very early splits are possible in North Carolina depending on where you live.

I took this photo Feb. 9 of one of my hives.

Bees are bringing in pollen – lots of it.

Also note the white new wax being built by the bees. This is important.



Drones



I found drone cells being built on burr comb attached to the bottom bar of frames.

When a hive is split, the beekeeper has a choice of letting the new split raise a queen or buy a queen to introduce to the split.

Methods

There are several ways to do this: I am going to recommend using the vertical split for early spring splits.

- Weather conditions are variable –some cold weather can be expected!
- A new split requires a good number of bees to keep several frames of brood warm – Brood nest temperatures are in the neighborhood of 92 Degrees F.
- If one is going to let the bees raise a new queen, it will take approximately three to four weeks before new bees are being added to the bee population. Generally a new hive will take considerable time to build bee populations.

A Vertical Split

Equipment needed:

Other than a hive box and frames needed for the split, a double screen is essential. An upper entrance is provided by the screen.



The use of a double screen allows heat from a strong hive to move up to help the new split keep warm.

A double screen is easy to build and many bee supply stores will have them on hand to sell. I can say without hesitation, that the double screen is an important piece of bee equipment.

The Process is easy!

1. Have all equipment in place .
2. Select the hive to be split.
3. Select a good warm day to work.

An assumption I am using is a person is using deep 10 frame deep boxes but adaptations can be made for medium boxes and 8 frame equipment.

- Remove top cover and inner cover.
- Locate two frames with eggs, larva, capped brood, some pollen and capped honey. Make sure the queen is not on them. Set them aside. (nuc boxes work well for this.)
- Determine the winter cluster location. If the queen is not on the frames you remove from the hive, it will not be necessary to find her.
- If one does accidentally move the queen, the queen can be quickly restored to the hive below the screen.

Comb Management



It is important to manage the frames the bees cluster on during cold spells.

Heat generated by bees in the cluster make this method work well.

Bees can raise the temperature in the cluster to 92 degree F. required for egg, larva and capped brood development. Some of this heat is lost and moves up in the hive.

Bees Frames of bees

I use four frames to start a new split – two frames with young brood covered with bees, a frame of pollen and honey and a frame of drawn comb.

A good strong hive will have frames that can be removed without much damage to the hive. Full frames of capped brood should be avoided.

I add a feeder.



How I do it!



Remove the top cover and inner cover.

1 -- Select two frames with required eggs, larva, capped brood, pollen and honey stores. Also find a frame of honey and pollen and one frame of drawn comb. The developing split will need food. I generally add a division board feeder to the split.



2- Once the basic split hive components have been identified, put the hive back together to keep the winter cluster area intact. Add frames to replace the 4 frames being used for the new split.

3 – Place the double screen on the hive. Cover the screen wire with newspaper to block queen pheromones. **The presence of the queen's pheromone may delay the bees from starting queen cells.**



4 – Set an empty box on the double screen and arrange frames with bees and brood so they are above the bee cluster below.

5 -- Close the hive and wait a few days to see if the bees begin queen cells. Later – a month or so, the new split can be set off onto its own bottom board.

Why I like this method over others:

- **IT IS FAST AND EASY**
 - **THE RESULTS ARE BETTER – ALL BEES IN THE HIVE REMAIN WITH THE HIVE.**
 - **IF THE SPLIT IS UNSUCCESSFUL, THE DOUBLE SCREEN CAN BE REMOVED AND THE HIVE HAS LOST NOTHING. Try again later.**
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- **If done early in the season, both the mother hive and the split can make a honey crop.**
 - **Other options become available.**
 - **Have you ever given thought to a two queen hive? (More bees equal more honey).**
 - **Moving the mother hive and letting the new hive pick up foraging bees -- making it stronger.**
 - **Repeating the process to sell nucs or queens**



I will welcome any questions about making increases – and other questions you have about bee topics if we have time.

I publish a weekly newsletter “Stahlman Beekeeping Notes”. The newsletter covers many beekeeping topics related to what is happening in Raleigh. But the newsletter has readers from many sections of the United States and Canada.

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING NOTES FOR 2023

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Feeding bees & some notes on what it means to get in over your head!

During my commercial bee days, I kept diaries of daily activities. On March 11, 1994 I wrote "Ever felt like trying to move a lake with a teaspoon?" Those were days when I drove to Georgia to keep bees and when I could spend a few days in Ohio, I would check on bee yards to see if the bees were alive and which needed feeding.

The topic of feeding bees can be made simple – Bees die without food!

Many hives die of starvation during February and March. Records of hives I visited when I was home from Georgia gave me the following figures:

Doran yard #1	1 hive alive	3 dead
Dorna yard #2	2 hives alive	14 dead
Doran yard #3	11 hives alive	3 dead
Voryes yard #1	22 hives alive	2 dead
Voryes yard #2	20 hives alive	6 dead
Alexandria yard	20 hives alive	4 dead
Total hives alive	76	Dead 32

These were strong hives that I did not take to Georgia for the winter of 1993-94. I thought all was okay.

Two bee yards were missed when I did my feeding in the fall of 1993. The results clearly shows the success of fall feeding.

Some hives fail during the winter season even if one has fed them in

the fall. Bees in a hive fail for various reasons: Poor queens, mites, and bad management.

IMPORTANT POINTS

Beekeeping is a funny game.

What is one to do or believe when someone gives you advice about keeping bees?

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New beekeepers tend to believe what they are told.

Old beekeepers are pretty well fixed on methods they have used with success over and over again.

"Learning beekeeping by the trial and error method is one way to learn, even though the tuition may come at a high cost."

Quote from M.J. Deyll editor of Gleanings in Bee Culture 1947

Ads for bees for sale are popping up on my

Contact me at : stahlmanapiaries@aol.com and ask to be added to my mailing list. The newsletter is free and the mailing list is sent blind so others do not have access to your email address.