

Wintering Bees

Step 1. Mid August to early September. Check that the colony has a laying queen, eggs and larvae and sealed brood. If there is no queen, unite the colony to a queenright colony, or call for help. Your colony should have at least five deep frames of bees - some beekeepers' winter hives on a brood and a half, with no queen excluder.

Step 2. On the same day as step 1 above, remove part-filled supers & check the weight of the hive by lifting one side from the stand. The hive should feel as if it is nailed to the hive stand. A colony will need the equivalent of about 18kg of honey or sugar syrup to survive the winter - late honey stored in September is a bonus. Feed any light hives with a rapid feeder, preferably a tray feeder such as a Miller or Ashforth (or if preferred a 5 pint rapid feeder). Tray feeders allow you to feed up to 10 litres of syrup very quickly. Make the syrup with one electric kettle full of hot water to 3 x 1kg bags of sugar or purchase any commercially available syrup. Always reduce the hive entrance and feed in the evening to prevent robbing.

Aim to finish winter-feeding by early September. Feeding in early September stimulates the queen to continue laying for a while. If you delay feeding until October, the weather may be cold and the bees will not take the feed down.

Step 3. Remove the empty feeder when hive weight is OK. Place an eke, (or an empty super box if you don't have an eke) a 25mm high square wooden frame, on the top brood box. Place a tray of Apiguard or equivalent Varroacide on the top brood frames, open side up, and refit the crown board on the eke or super, with the feeder holes sealed. If using an open mesh floor, fit the mite catch tray and put a square of old carpet or a slab of expanded polystyrene or Kingspan or other insulation type materials on the crown board. This stays on all winter.

Aim to have completed your Varroa treatments by early September - you want a hive of healthy bees for the winter. If you wait until October, it may be too late - you will potentially have a hive of bees damaged by varroa & very little new brood to replace them.

Step 4. After 10 days, remove the mite catch tray and note if the mite drop is low, medium or high, compared to your other hives - scrape the catch tray clean it thoroughly and refit. Check if any varroacide type trays such as Apiguard have been emptied. If yes, fit a second tray. Leave the first tray in place, to remind you that you have fitted the second tray. If no, wait a further four days and then fit second tray.

Step 5. After two weeks, remove any trays or other treatments. Remove the eke or super and the mite catch tray; clean the tray and store for winter.

Step 6. Optionally, on the same day as step 5 you could fit a super of **drawn** combs, including any part-filled combs or combs wet from extracting, to store late season honey, balsam or ivy - no queen excluder is needed.

Step 7. Remove entrance block and fit mouse guard.

Now you can go skiing!!