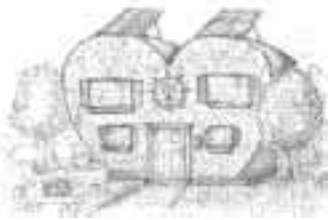


Home & Heart



Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

©1999 Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

This has been the Season of the Bees for me. If I am at home, I am constantly looking in on my two hives and discussing bee-havior with my friend, Mona. She started one hive this spring when I started two. We are both novices, and we have been lugeing the learning curve together from the beginning.

Location, Location, Location

Before I picked up my bees, I carefully chose the exact place for the hive stand. We have two 1,350 gallon black polyethylene water tanks up on the property line behind our house. I thought this would be the perfect place for the stand. It gets first sun in the morning and then has sun most of the day. I figured the water tanks would provide wind protection.

I was wrong. There was not enough wind protection. We had an unusually cold spring. Neither of my hives flourished. The bees would barely leave the hives. I put up a plywood wind break on one side of the water tanks. After that, the white hive (the one closest to the windbreak) became more active and took up more syrup from the feeder. The Celtic hive (it has a Celtic knot painted on the hive body) never really became as active as the white hive.

After a time, I checked for newly laid brood and found it in both hives. You can rarely actually find a queen in the hive, so the brood is the indicator of a working queen. I did not have the hives open for long because of the cold weather.

The brood must be kept at 92°F (33°C) in order to mature. I left the hives alone except for feeding them for a long time. The Celtic hive remained slow and not very active. The white hive was more lively, with bees constantly coming and going from its entrance.

Dethroned

I finally had Bob-O go up with me one warm day and

really check out the hives. We found brood in both hives and a lot of drones (male bees). In the Celtic hive, we found a queen cell, but it was empty.

The hive will produce more drones to help keep the hive warm. They are larger than the workers and just hang around the hive generating heat. Their only other function is to fertilize the queen on her one mating flight. When the outside temperature gets warmer and the hive heats up, the drones are cast out to die.

A hive will only build a queen cell if it needs a queen. This might be to split a hive that has gotten too large for its home. In that case, approximately half of the bees leave with the old queen and leave the new queen in the old hive. The other reason for hatching a queen is because there is no queen in the hive (queenlessness). In that case, laying workers appear who will lay eggs and try to raise brood. Their attempts will ultimately be unsuccessful. The only type of bee a laying worker can produce is a drone. I suspected the Celtic hive of queenlessness.

John, the Bee Guy

My friend Dave has a friend who keeps bees locally. He gave me the name and a phone number to call if I had bee questions. The only caveat was that I was not to consider this man an expert. I immediately dubbed the friend "John, the bee guy." I promised myself I would only call him if I was totally stumped. I called him.

John, the bee guy, has several hives and has been keeping bees for four years. He may not be an expert, but he's got it all over me for experience. When I called, I described what I found and what I thought. I asked if he had ever experienced queenlessness. Once he thought he had, but then the hive recovered and was able to survive the winter. He advised me to let the hive run its course, be that survive or perish. I resigned myself to just that.

Bee Tree

We had gotten up at 5 AM in order to be on the road to the Oregon Country Fair by 6. At ten minutes of 6, I realized I needed to fill the feeders on the hives. I started up the hill to the hives with George, a visiting friend who used to keep bees. At the base of the path in the Asian Pear tree, there was a swarm of bees.

I went up the hill to fill the feeders and check the hives. George went back to tell Bob-O we wouldn't be on the road by 6. Since I didn't have an extra hive to put the swarm in, I decided to hive the swarm into the hive I suspected of queenlessness. George had hived swarms before and talked me through it step by step. I knocked the bulk of the swarm into a cardboard box by shaking the small tree sharply. Then I went on up the hill to the hive. I placed a single sheet of newspaper on

top of the hive body. I then put an upper entrance (Imrie shim) on top of that.

I placed a full sized super (bee box) on top of that, and then I was ready to pour the swarm in. After the major part of the swarm was in the top super, I replaced the frames and put the lid on. With the cardboard box and my bee brush, I gathered as many loose bees from the tree as I could. I added those to the hive. Then I left for a week.

The single sheet of newspaper was for separating the two sets of bees temporarily. By the time the bees had chewed through the paper, the old bees would have had time to accept the new queen. That was my theory and what did I have to lose anyway? I hived that swarm in twenty minutes start to finish.

Swarm Again

Bob-O called home while we were gone and Mona had found a swarm of bees in the peach tree across the path from the pear tree. She got the camera and took pictures for us. Soon after, they were gone.

That's okay with me. Now there is a swarm of wild bees out there somewhere. We need more wild bees. When I returned home from the fair, the newspaper I'd left had been eaten though, but the population of the hive seemed no greater than before I added the swarm. I now think that the swarm Mona found was the swarm I had hived, and that they rejected my hiving attempts.

Bee Patient

Neither of my hives are doing as well as Mona's. Her hive is in a protected area out of the wind, on the hillside. Hers is a healthy, thriving hive. Mine are struggling still. I put an old table top on the two hives to provide shade in the hot part of the day. I went though the hives and alternated frames full of honey with empty frames.

I removed the queen excluder on the white hive. A queen excluder is a metal screen that allows worker bees to pass through to the upper super and frames, but keeps the larger queen in the lower brood box. That way you don't have brood mixed in with the honey on the frames. Sometimes, especially in newly built comb, the new workers hatched are larger than subsequent workers and cannot easily pass through the excluder.

Bee Prepared

Here is what I have learned so far. Medicate your hives in the spring and fall. There are several preventative medications to be fed to your bees, but not during a nectar flow. John, the bee guy, clued me in on that one. Always have extra bottom boards and hive bodies with frames and covers ready to go in case a hive swarms. I thought I had at least one season before I would need

them. If I had had the equipment ready, I could have hived that swarm and put it in a better location right then. Wind—cold or warm—totally stresses a hive. Your hive location must have sun in winter and shade in summer.

I am rooting for these hives to survive. However at the same time I am planning a new location for my next hives and gathering more equipment now. I have learned that the hives can't be moved more than three feet after they are set up (unless they are moved more than three miles) or they will swarm back to the original location.

My experiences have not deterred me at all. I figure if these hives make it though the winter, they'll be ready to start growing early in the spring. I will be starting more hives in any case. This time I will know to place them in a better location. I am a bee wrangler.

Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is taking a class in Web publishing at her local college and planting lavender at her home in Northernmost California, c/o *Home Power*, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520 • kathleen.jarschke-schultze@homepower.com

