

Home & Heart



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Bob-O read somewhere that people are afraid of death, electricity, and bees, in that order. I've read everything I could find on the subject of bees and beekeeping, and I find I only fear the first two. I will replace the third with "sharp knives" or "deep water."

Bee Adventurous

I went to pick up my bees on May first. I had set up my empty hives the evening before. On one hive I had painted a blue Celtic knot to help the bees identify their own hive. The two hives were next to each other on the south-facing, 18 inch high stand I had built.

The bee supplier we chose does not ship, so my friend Mona and I drove the 100 miles south to the bee ranch to pick up three packages of bees—two for me and one for her.

Each package includes three pounds of bees and a queen. They were all Italians, the most common bee in American beekeeping. The package consists of a box made of thin wooden slats with screen on the two broad sides. The queen is in her own cage, which is attached so it hangs down inside the box of bees. There is a can of sugar syrup that also hangs down into the package.

Bee Ranch

We knew we had arrived when we saw the orchard with all the bee hives. I went up and knocked on the door, and the beekeeper's wife answered. She said he was out in the trees somewhere, tending the bees, so she would get the bees for us. Okay, that seemed fine. We walked across the yard to a large metal building. The heavy door slid open and there in the warm, dark interior were our bees.

The three packages had been attached to each other with wooden lath. When you picked one up, the others came with it. The bees were buzzing quite a lot, being disturbed by the noise and light of our entry. The woman lifted the packages by the wood strips and followed me to my car. Several loose bees followed us too, the scent of the queens being irresistible to them.

I had put my station wagon's back seat down and spread a clean white sheet for our bees to rest on. When we set the packages in the car, the solo bees came in too. So we drove home with the packaged bees buzzing in the back and the strays flying around the interior of the car. Every time I would hear one by a window I would use the power control to lower the window and try to lose the bee. They were too wiley for that maneuver and would fly back to the screen of the closest package and rest there.

Hive Jive

By the time we got home it was about four in the afternoon and windy. We put our bee suits on and hived one of my packages. You can never get every bee out of the box. So after you pour out all that you can, you lay the the box at the entrance so that the remaining bees come out and enter the hive.

We then went up the road and hived Mona's bees. When I returned to my hives, all but one bee had gone into the first hive. I quickly hived the third package, not wanting to chill the queen. As with the first hive, I laid the package facing the entrance.

Earlier I had made some feeders using gallon jars with holes drilled into the lids. We placed these (one each) over the oblong hole on the inside cover of the hive, which is a lipped board placed directly over the frames. Then an empty full-sized super (basically a wooden box without a top or bottom) went over that. Finally, the outer telescoping cover was weighted down with a cinder block to make the hive weathertight.

The syrup in the feeder was a mixture of half water and half white sugar. We also placed one quart entrance feeders (Boardman type) on each hive. An entrance cleat reduces the entrances to conserve heat and allow the small number of bees (12,000) to protect their hive from intruders.

Bee Zen

The next morning I could hardly wait to check the hives. There were a couple of dead bees outside the entrance of the Celtic hive and about 25 dead bees outside the white hive. This didn't seem too bad. My plan was to wait for the first warm day and then release the queens. I had picked the packages up on a Saturday and the first warm day was supposed to be Tuesday. Bees need several days to accept a new queen. If released too soon, the hive bees might kill her.

On Sunday, I panicked. What if the queens starved before I released them? I called the bee ranch. The owner assured me that the queens would not starve, they just would not be able to start laying eggs yet. This was not an issue for me as my bees were starting out with new foundation and had to draw out the cells before the queens could begin laying anyway.

Bees are very serious about "bee space." If there is more than 3/8 inch or less than 1/4 inch, the bees will fill the



Kathleen lifts a frame out of the super.

space with propolis or spur comb. There's a little bit of slop between the frames and you have to get them evenly spaced. Since I was in a hurry to close the hives when I first installed the packages, I left too much space between two of the frames in the white hive. Now whenever I check it I have to scrape the spur comb off the inside cover.

Royal Outing

I released the queens on Tuesday as planned. They were alive and active. After I saw that, I quickly closed the hives to conserve heat. I ended up erecting a wind break next to the white hive. They became more active after that. I checked the hives one warm day. The Celtic hive has been very slow at drawing comb on the foundation. They are only working on four frames. The white hive has filled and capped several frames and is drawing comb on eight of the ten frames.

I think I need to put up a wind break by the Celtic hive. It is essential that the bees be able to keep the newly laid brood at a temperature of 92°F. With the downright cold weather we have had through May and into June, I am worried about the Celtic hive. I don't know if it can recover from this setback.

Bee Wrangling

I love beekeeping. It is totally fascinating. The more I am

around the bees, the less safety gear I wear. I usually wear just a head net and gloves. Once I was up filling the entrance feeders and I felt something crawling on my stomach. I lifted my shirt and a bee flew out.

I started a bee calendar in a monthly monitor datebook that had enough room on each day to keep notes. I record what the bees are doing and what I do to and for the bees. I also keep a running log of what plants and trees are blooming that the bees can utilize.

When I am out in my yard or garden and I see a honey bee, I just want to go sit and watch the hives. Sometimes I do just that. The bees come and check me out. Then they return to the hive. They are my friends, the bees.

Access

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I recommend that you get these two books before you get your bees:

ABC and XYZ of Bee Culture, The A. I. Root Bee Library, US\$30 postpaid within the U.S. The A. I. Root Company, PO Box 706, Medina, OH 44258 • 800-289-7668 or 330-725-6677, ext. 3219 • Fax: 330-725-5624 kim@airoot.com • www.airoot.com • This is an encyclopedia on the scientific and practical culture of bees, first published in 1872 and reprinted regularly since. It's the bible of bees, a big thick reference, but kind of dry reading.

Honey Bees and Beekeeping, A Year in the Life of an Apiary, Keith S. Delaplane, University of Georgia. Available from Mann Lake Ltd. (see below) for US\$17.50 postpaid within the U.S. Great book, up-to-date on technique and treatments. Lots of pictures and a great read.

You also need to have your equipment before you get the bees. Here are several suppliers I have used:

Brushy Mountain Bee Farm, 610 Bethany Church Rd., Moravian Falls, NC 28654 • 800-233-7929 or 336-921-3640 • Fax: 336-921-2681 • sforrest@wilkes.net www.beeequipment.com

Mann Lake Ltd., 501 S. 1st St., Hackensack, MN 56452-2001 • 800-233-6663 or 218-675-6688 Fax: 218-675-6156 • beekeepr@mannlakeltd.com www.mannlakeltd.com

Mid-Continent Agrimarketing Inc., 1465 North Winchester, Olathe, KS 66061-5881 • 800-547-1392 or 913-768-8967 Fax: 913-768-8968 • mail@mid-conagri.com www.mid-conagri.com

Excellent Web site:
www.birkey.com/BLB/Beekeeping/besuply.html

