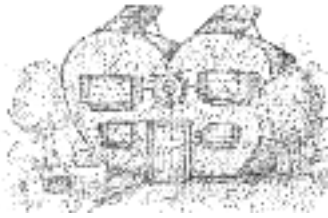


Home & Heart



Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze

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We are definitely experiencing the drought here at Casa Schultze. We lost our hydropower about a month ago. We pump water from the creek for our garden. Now we can only pump in the morning, before the pool we pump from goes dry. So far, it refills at night, but with this dry, hot wind every day, even that water source will not last long.

We keep one 1,350 gallon (5,110 l) water tank full, in case of fire. Our other tank, the same size, is filled (and I use the term loosely) from the creek and used on the fruit trees, garden, grape arbor, and perennial plants. We have changed as many plants to drip lines as we can. Now all others must be hand watered—no more overhead sprinkling. Our house water system is from a spring, which dried up in the drought of 1991. That was when we drilled a well. It looks like we will be on well water for everything soon.

Warm Swarm

Until recently, I had five bee hives. Now I have six. Bob-O came in from work one warm spring evening and said, "Did you know we have a swarm out here?" Well, I didn't know. He and I donned our bee suits, got some ladders, and retrieved the swarm. I held onto the branch while Bob-O sawed it off. Then I climbed down the ladder and shook the bees into a hive body I had waiting close by. They went willingly.

The swarm had come from one of my very first hives. It's my guess that the hive swarmed because of the windy conditions on our hillside. Being a novice, I had placed my first hives in a good place for sun, but a totally rotten place for wind. This particular hive had always struggled against the wind. Although it survived, it never did well.

A swarm will leave the hive with roughly half or more of the resident bees and the old queen. The swarm is made up of a mixture of old and young bees. The remaining bees and the new queen have to build their population back up, but their comb is drawn (already built), and they have some honey and pollen stored. A vigorous, young queen can keep her nurse bees busy tending her new brood.

I saw a chance to correct my error in hive placement. Two days after we found the swarm, I moved the swarm hive, in the new hive body, to a friend's house on the Klamath River. I talked another friend into letting me bring the old hive off the hillside, to work his blackberry thicket. The thicket is at least 50 by 20 foot (15 by 6 m). He was going to cut it down. Then he found that an array of bird species used it for nesting. So he left it alone. After my bees crop the blackberries, I will bring them home and put the hive in the beeyard proper.

My beeyard is now downwind in our canyon, beyond our large storage building and several smaller outbuildings that block the wind. Three sides are bordered by an old wooden corral, a large wooden gate, and a huge loading chute for cattle. The fourth side, down canyon, is fenced with 6 foot (1.8 m) high hog wire.

This cool little PV powered fan helps bees beat the heat.





Kathleen's runaway swarm buzzing in the tree.



The bee queen with her branch full of bees.

3 Feet, 3 Miles

I couldn't just move the old hive from the windy place to the beeyard, since bees have a peculiar habit. You can move bees 3 feet (0.9 m) or 3 miles (5 km). If you move them any distance in between, they will return to the place of the old hive and die from exposure.

The old hive was up a hillside too steep to drive. I took all my bee gear there in a wheelbarrow. Usually the two deep supers filled with bees and honey are too heavy for me to pick up, put in the wheelbarrow, and get down the hill. But since it was fairly early in the season when they swarmed, the hive bodies were still light. Not so much honey; not so many bees.

I took off the medium supers, used for collecting surplus spring honey, and extracted what was in them. After moving the hive to the blackberry patch, I returned the extracted comb supers to the top of the hive. The bees will clean the comb and start filling the supers with blackberry honey. First though, they fill any comb in the deep supers not used for brood with honey for their winter food. I love my bees. I never run out of fascination for their behavior. It's like having an ongoing biology experiment in my yard.

Solar Bees

One of my bee magazines advertised a solar powered hive cooler. In hot weather, the bees expend a lot of energy and time cooling their hive. Worker bees that would otherwise be gathering honey are positioned at

the entrance, fanning their wings to facilitate air movement in the hive. This cools the hive, and helps evaporate and concentrate the nectar into honey.

I knew I could make a cooler, so I did. I ordered a shallow super, the kind usually used for comb honey production. It is standard Langstroth size, but only 4-3/4 inches (12 cm) deep. Before I glued and nailed it together, I had Bob-O cut three, 2-1/2 inch (6.4 cm) holes in one short side with a hole saw.

I used an inside cover, with a hole cut in the center to hold a small 12 VDC muffin fan. I placed some window screen on the hole before attaching the fan to keep the bees from going into it. I cut a small groove in the edge of the super to snake out the wires from the fan. Wood glue secured the completed fan and cover to the bottom of the super. I also glued window screen over the three exhaust holes on the side.

I placed the whole assembly on top of the two medium supers that topped one of my hives in the beeyard. I picked this particular hive for the experiment because the front of the hive always had a lot of bees on it in the heat of the day. The order of the hive from top to bottom is bottom board, two deep hive bodies, a queen excluder, two medium supers, the solar air exchanger, and finally the outside cover.

After placing the unit on the hive, I hooked up a small, 2 watt solar panel with alligator clips to the fan wires. It worked, and quietly too. The air is drawn into the hive

entrance above the bottom board, moves up through the hive bodies and supers, goes through the fan, and is exhausted through the vent holes on the side of the unit. The air from the vent holes smells wonderful.

The bees seem to appreciate the help ventilating their hive. They no longer mass on the outside on hot days. We'll see how their honey production compares with the other hives in the same beeyard.

Glad Rag

Our friend, Bob Maynard, wanted to send me a dishcloth. He said, "This is the most expensive dishcloth you will ever buy, but you'll love it." Now I know I have a tendency to wax enthusiastic about many things. I am easily pleased and amused, but a dishcloth? Bob said, "I cooked bacon, wiped up the bacon grease on the stove, and then cleaned my glasses with the same cloth." Does that sound like a testing challenge or what? I told him to send me one.

The brand name is Mystic Maid, and it is a microfiber cleaning cloth. It was originally developed for "clean room" applications in the semiconductor industry. The cloth is made from soft, woven microfibers that are split many, many times to create an increased surface area with millions of tiny hooks and channels.

The best thing about this cloth is that you do not need any cleaning agents with it. You get the cloth wet with plain water, wring it out as much as you can, and use it. No soap, no detergents, no chemicals—just plain water.

You can use it dry for dusting, and as an antistatic cloth. You can clean CDs, DVDs, or your eyeglasses with it and it won't scratch them. To clean the cloth, just put it in with your regular cold water laundry. Let it air dry. Don't use fabric softeners or bleach on it.

The Bacon Test

When I got the cloth, I got it wet and wrung out as much water as I could. I had fried bacon that morning on my black enamel stove. It was very messy and greasy. I usually use a spray cleaner to clean up that kind of mess.

I used the cloth on the whole top of the stove, the oven door, the chrome trim—everything. I thought I'd be smearing grease everywhere, but I wasn't. It actually worked. There were some wipe marks, but they disappeared within seconds. I pulled my finger across the recently cleaned surface. It squeaked.

I've had the cloth a couple of months now, and have used it frequently. I've washed the cloth many times, and it still does what it claims. The reduced use of cleaning chemicals in my house pleases me immensely. Viva la technology!

Access

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