

# How to Purchase Honeybees

## Packages

- Should consist of bees shaken from brood frames of colonies into a cage for transport.
- Are they nurse bees? 2lbs vs 3lbs – basically you ensure you have more nurse bees... or do you? All depends who does the shaking. Know the source of the packages.
- Each package comes with a mated queen. The more nurse bees in the package, the better/sooner the artificial swarm will establish itself. These queens are freshly mated. In other words, as soon as the queens start to lay, they are put into these transport (package) boxes via a queen cage. At most these queens are 2-3 weeks old from emergence.
- The bee package is immediately sent via mail or it is shipped via climate controlled trucks to various bulk distribution points for pickup by beekeepers.
- There is the stress of transport therefore DO NOT blow off picking up a package. Immediately place it in your hive body and watch the colony grow.

## What about the freshly mated queen?

- It requires approx **45-55** days to properly evaluate a mated queen *from emergence from the queen cell*. So yeah, kinda rollin the dice with regards to the queens they send with the packages
- The good news is we are going to address this by supplying queens whose mothers overwintered with no or little chemical treatment for the club. We will utilize the Demaree method and go with a two queen colony. There are hazards such as increased brood cycles/varroa, but after you evaluate your queen, you can artificially induce a brood break, treat etc. We will of course help guide you.
- Or stay with your package queen, your bees, your choice.

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## Nucleus Colonies/Nucs (5Frames)

Nucs are a wonderful way to start a beehive. There are many types of nucs.

- **Overwintered nucs** are nucs with queens made the previous year (spring, summer and possibly even fall as Rich proved last year, normally no) whose queens made their own bees to overwinter. These queens are proven and in their prime for 1st honey crop producing season. Overwintered nucs can be offered at any time. I normally sell mine in February as people are assured they are indeed overwintered, they come to my apiary and see for themselves preceded by the inspector! Poor Bernie Andrews was out here last year in Feb. This is the standard against which other nucs should be judged. Prime queen for honey crop with her own bees from the previous summer. I normally charge \$175 USD.
- Overwintered nucs can also be *overwintered production hives* that are split into two hives(nuc or 10Fr/any combo) in the spring. The queen from the production hive is normally in her 2<sup>nd</sup> season for honey crop and thus not considered to be a prime queen. You want a vigorous healthy queen. She may fit the bill, I don't know. She is proven and produced a crop with her own bees.

## Spring splits and spring nucs

- are made with frames of capped/open brood supplied with a queen **or queenless** (left to make their own queen - NOT IDEAL). After approx 30 days or far far longer, the queen should have laid all the brood in the box.
- Sometimes a spring split or nuc is supplied with a freshly mated queen from a reputable supplier. Again, refer to the above caveat about evaluating queens. This queen should be readily accepted by the hatching nurse bees and start laying immediately.
- Sometimes a virgin queen is introduced, accepted, she mates and begins to lay.
- Sometimes a queen cell is introduced, the cell is accepted, she mates, and begins to lay.
- If the producer creates a spring split/nuc with a *mated queen*, the producer did not create... you do not know what you are getting unless the nuc producer is extremely familiar with the queens history. One can deliberately put in all stages of brood, put in the queen and as soon as he/she sees eggs, call it a spring nuc! The queen is untested, unevaluated and the bees could supercede her after they do their own evaluation 30 days after introduction.
- If the producer creates a spring split/nuc with a mated queen from the previous year from a different hive from the producer's apiary, you still have the same problem, but at least you know the producer made the queen (albeit 2<sup>nd</sup> year plus) and the acceptance will probably be 100% as the producer moved the laying queen onto laying capped brood frames. This is more palatable than the above situation.

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- If the producer created an early split or nuc and allowed it to create its own queen, this is a terrible scenario as the queen is a huge unknown. Was the queen well fed? Were there enough nurse bees? Too many unknowns.

**Ideally** a spring split or spring nuc is created with a queen made by the local producer with the producers own bees. The local queen will be freshly mated through cell introduction (and mating) or transplanted from a mating colony and vigorously laying **for at least 30 days** IN THE NUC to show all stages of brood (egg to hatching) and patterns. This should provide time for the bees to have undergone their own evaluation of the queen and fully accepted her without supercedure. (45-55 evaluation rule).

I believe I explained the possible scenarios, can't really think of different ones.

## Final Thoughts

Under **ideal conditions** (I MEAN EVERYTHING GOING RIGHT), if I grafted queens after the first sight of drones, say April 1<sup>st</sup>, the earliest the resulting final product would be ready would be May 23<sup>rd</sup>. The following is a timeline of what occurs between April 1 and May 23<sup>rd</sup>.

- April 1 - Graft queen cells and place in cell builder colony
- April 14 - Grafted queen cells should be emerging and need to be placed in queenless colonies (5 frame or 4 frame nucs)
- April 24 – Queens should be mated and laying
- May 23-24 Successful colonies should have a vigorous queen and brood at every age and the bees to show. These colonies would be available for sale and worth purchasing as a Spring nucleus colony

**The May23-24 date is with everything going right folks. In 2019, the end product date would have been June 7th.**

- You cannot make queens until you start seeing drones
- Then I normally give it a week before I start so the emerging queens to coincide with the maturity of the drones
- You I need colonies strong enough to support the queen cell builder. The earliest we will have spring nucs “worthy” for sale is the final week of May. The further north you go the later this date is. The further south you go the earlier this date is. Protect yourself by informing yourself. Ask the seller reasonable questions should you have them.