

# The Arkansas Beekeeper's Year



As a disclaimer, it must be noted that Arkansas is a very diversified state. While we don't occupy a huge landmass, we do cover a variety of topographical, geological and agricultural situations. This makes it difficult to make the following chart one of clear rules without variances. Our diversification creates variables, which makes general rules difficult.

Even within the categories of hills, bottoms and delta, there are specific conditions that can make a huge difference in managing bees. Climatic conditions vary as do the specific crops and the wild forage available to the bees from area to area. It is therefore important to use the following chart as a very general rule of thumb. Adaptations to localized areas are necessary and remember that beekeeping is an art and science of continued fine-tuning.

The following is not pretending to be a perfect calendar for your area nor is it specific in the use of medications. It is meant to be a general guide to give the hobbyist or new beekeeper an idea of *The Arkansas Beekeeper's Year*.

# *Winter* - Clean up and repair season



**December** - By this time, the medications should be finished, bees needing fed should have it in the hive, the harvest and extraction completed and it's time to clean up. With the days at their shortest and a chill in the air, it's best to move projects inside. Finish cleaning up the yard and take inventory of repairs.

**January** - Catching up on reading, making wax products, building frames and eating and drinking honey sweetened foods are all good things for the beekeeper and his/her family to be doing at this time of the year. It might be a good time to repair, paint and clean equipment. It's time also to order equipment, supplies, queens and bees for next season.

**February** - Arkansas often has warm days in February and if you can catch one, it's a good time to see that you have a laying queen and look quickly for diseases. The bees should still have the majority of their winter stores and the beekeeper should check to be sure there is plenty for them to eat and feed to the new brood. Feeding a non-stimulating feed (two parts sugar : one part water) at this point is often necessary .

# Spring - Build-up and Swarming Season



**March** - There's often a cold snap in March. This can be hard on bees that have already started a large brood area. Not only do they have trouble keeping it warm enough; they also can easily run out of feed. The beekeeper needs to be ready for such conditions. Sometimes it is necessary to combine weaker colonies with stronger ones to get past this period. Use newspapers between the boxes when combining.

Always be prepared to feed in March. Once past this risk, the beekeeper should consider reversing brood chambers, moving brood down to the lower box so they can expand upward. This may need to be done again in a few weeks. It's time to finish up on the medications so that no residues are in the hive during honey production. You can switch from a heavy feed to a more stimulating one (one part sugar : one part water) in March to simulate a nectar flow. At the same time, you can replace old frames with frames with foundation. Remove mouse guards on the stronger colonies.

**April** - This is a good time for replacing queens who are more than a year old and making splits if you want increased numbers. It's also the time to install packages or buy new bees. At any rate, swarm control is the order of the month. Keep in mind that swarming is a natural instinct but, for the beekeeper, a strong colony is more productive than two weaker ones. Be sure that instead of just adding supers you need to check to be sure that they are using the space they have. Checking the lower boxes and moving frames from the outside into the brood area can do this. Usually this time of year, the bees can make their own living and build their colonies up, but it is not yet time for surplus honey. Antibiotics should be out 30 days before any surplus supers are put on hives. It's also time to be finishing up with the miticides. If you've introduced new queens, don't forget to check on them a week or so after they've been installed. If you do not want increased numbers you will need to keep a look out for swarm cells on a weekly basis and destroy them. Equalizing your weaker colonies with your stronger ones also serves as swarm control while strengthening the weaker ones.

**May** - In most areas of the state there is a nectar flow starting by now. Swarming season is not over yet either and you should still be on the look out for queen cells. As the colony starts to get crowded and as you can see whitening along the tops of the frames, it's time to add supers. "Under supering" or "baiting" supers is always more effective in getting the bees to use the space.

# Summer



**June** - By now the honey flow has been going for a while, the days are warm and long and the swarming seasons are pretty much over. Continue to be sure that there's enough room but don't just put the supers on colonies, which don't need them. Check your mite levels to be sure you're not running into problems yet. Sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice a honey crop for the sake of saving the bees if mite levels are running high.

**July** - Generally speaking, in the hills, the honey flow is pretty much over while July marks the real beginning of a couple of major flows in the bottoms and delta regions. If you are in the hills, take off your honey before your bees start bringing in bitterweed honey. It can give unwanted flavor to your crop. Don't forget that you need to consider the bee's needs when taking the surplus crop. Be sure to leave enough for them to get through the up-coming dearth. In cotton and soybean areas, you might want to take off your surplus spring crop and prepare for the summer flows.

**August** - In the hills, this is a dearth month whereas the delta is in the throws of major flows. Therefore, mite control is in order in the hills while seeing that enough supers are in place is required in the delta.



## - Winter Preparation Season



**September** - Cotton nectar is finished by now and soybeans are finishing up. For those who profit from those crops, it's time to start taking them off. Consider that it's always easier to take off honey before the flow is completely over as the bees aren't as protective of their bounties while they're still bringing it in. This is also a critical time for the Varroa mites. If their population is of any consequence, at this time it will start damaging worker brood because drone brood is less common. Meanwhile, in the hills and bottoms, this is a time of possible fall flows like Spanish Needles, Goldenrod and the beginning of Asters. Generally, these should be considered to be bounties for the hives' winter demands. Fall medication should be started now for the prevention of foulbrood and the control of Tracheal and Varroa mites. If you prefer fall requeening, this is the time to do it.

**October** - Usually a nice month, weather-wise and an important time to finish preparing the hives for the winter ahead. Check on queens recently installed. It's also time to be sure that there's enough honey in the hives to get through the winter months. If feeding is needed, a heavy feed is in order (two parts sugar : one part water). It is also the optimum time for the feeding of Fumidil-B® for the control of Nosema which can be fed in the heavy syrup. Hive stacks should be reduced in size to be proportional to the size of the colony and their stores. Extraction should be finished up, mites should be under control and antibiotics should be finished up.

**November** - Weak colonies should be combined with stronger ones to pass the winter. Mouse guards should be put in place. Inventory should be appraised and yards cleaned up. Any last minute winter-feeding should be taken care of at this time. Most of all, this is a month of Thanksgiving. It is clear that the gift of bees, their pollination and golden honey, is something for which to be very thankful.