

REQUEENING A COLONY

Requeen a honey bee colony every year for better performance and production. The serviceable life of 99 percent of the queens is exhausted by the end of her second year in the colony. Requeening every other year is the least desirable practice. When the aged queen fails during the stress of the spring buildup, the colony organization becomes disrupted and the colony is nonproductive.

Order queens from a reputable breeder with a good line of bee stock. Place your orders well in advance so the breeder may raise the number of queens you need and mail them to you on the date you request delivery.

August is a good month to requeen a colony. When queens are introduced in August and not accepted by a colony, there is time to reorder and introduce the second queen to the colony.

When you are inspecting colonies in July or August, locate the queen and confine her to the lower brood chamber with a queen excluder over this chamber. When your queens arrive, you will have reduced the time required to find the queen in the colony.

When the caged queens arrive, remove the paper over the screen and place two or three drops of clean water on the screen away from the candy. Place the queen cages in a cool dark room until you are ready to introduce the queens into the colonies.

When you are ready to introduce the queens into the colonies, prepare the cages for introduction into the colonies. Remove the paper wrapping and stamps from the cages.

Remove the cork from the end of the cage to expose the candy which seals the queen in the cage. Place the queen cage in the shade near the hive into which the new caged queen will be introduced.

Requeening a hive is one of the most difficult parts of beekeeping. Too many times the new queen is killed by the bees when the beekeeper not fully understand what need to be done to make the bees accept a new queen.

There is a simple rule; make the bees want a new queen, and they will accept one.

So how do we get there? The fastest way is to remove the old queen, and introduce the new Push on cage queen to the hive straight away.

The push on cage is being used here. It is pushed into the comb where there are emerging young bees after brushing or shaking all the old bees off first. The new queen is left alone in the cage, and the frame is returned to the brood area and the hive is left for 10 days. The young bees emerging start feeding the new queen, and her pheromones are spread in the hive. Often the bees chew away wax so the queen will be able to walk out of the cage after a few days. This method works most of the time when there is a good honey flow.

However, there are times when it doesn't work to simply change the old queen for a younger. And because there are many things, some that we not yet fully understand, that determine whether the bees will accept the new queen or not, we should have a method that is safer and not depending on if there is a flow going on or having to feed. It does help to wait after removing the old queen before introducing the new. How long to wait is again depending on several factors, and can be anything from a couple of hours to two days.

There is a way to requeen that many have been using with 95% result. It was invented by a Swedish beekeeper, Lars Hedlund. You find the old queen, put her in a cage, and leave the cage in or close to the brood area. After two days, you come back and exchange that cage for another with the new queen in it. The new cage should have a candy plug so the bees can eat her out. Leave the bees for 10 days before checking if she has been accepted.

Why two days in the cage? After that period, the bees start to understand that something is wrong with the queen when she is not laying eggs anymore in the cells. If you wait longer the bees will start making their own queen from a small larvae. Once they have decided to do that they will not accept another queen so easily, and might kill the new queen you introduce. It is all a matter of timing.

