

Starting an Apidea by Amanda Millar

Make up the mini frames, cut some 1 inch strips of foundation and stick them into the tops of the frames using melted wax. Half fill the food compartment with fondant, some people mix in a bit of disease free honey too; I don't often bother with honey, but sometimes give them a bit of Neopol pollen substitute too. Make sure you have the hole in the Perspex cover aligned with the two adjacent half cutouts in the frames so you will be able to suspend a queen cell or cage there.

You need a mug of young house bees, they will have to make wax and feed the queen and subsequent brood. I get them from the supers of a big colony (you need to be sure you don't accidentally shake your queen in.) I use a large plastic cat litter tray, lift out a well covered super frame; that way I cause minimal disturbance to the donor colony, do not need to smoke it and am least likely to accidentally take the queen, a very light shake will remove the older foragers, give a sharp shake in to the tray to dislodge the younger bees, You may need to shake in several frames, the foragers will tend to fly off and the house bees will crawl around, give it a gentle shake to keep the crawlers in the tray, spray with a little water or these days I prefer to dust them with icing sugar instead, otherwise they get too sticky. Then pour about a mug full into the Apidea which you have already turned upside-down, with the floor slide open. A large elastic band around the whole box helps keep the lid on. Quickly slide the floor back into place without squashing any. Turn right way up and put in dark quiet place for 48 hours. They will roar a bit.

After 24 to 48 hours you can take off the polystyrene lid, leaving the clear cover in place, have a capped queen cell suspended on a toothpick through the top without damaging the cell, or cotton thread tied to toothpick, open the little 'Apidea' flap and suspend the cell. Virgins I hatch in an incubator and keep in the airing cupboard for 24 hours until their queenly smells have developed, offering them a drop of sugar syrup 2-3 times a day. I made tiny cylindrical cages of plastic mesh, with fondant blocking the base to put the virgins in. When introduced, close flap and replace lid. Next day make sure the queen is released, and remove the cage. I have known the fondant to go rock hard and she can die in there.

After another 24 hours in the dark you can take them out to your chosen place and open them up at dusk. Make sure the little queen excluder slide is not covering the entrance as the virgin will need to go out to mate. It is better if they are not too close to other hives in order to reduce disturbance and robbing risk.

Leave time for hatching plus 7-10 days for mating before checking for eggs, but do check food regularly and top up fondant or invert syrup if required. If pollen is going in it is promising, I have sometimes heard queen piping and several times spotted a virgin going out or coming back from her mating flight, usually between 11am and 2pm, if you see several bees at the entrance Nasanov fanning, the virgin may be out mating, so best to do inspections early or late in the day to avoid disturbing a returning queen.

If you are making up an Apidea to store an old mated queen in eg as part of swarm control then use bees from her colony preferably nurse bees from the brood area, having found your old queen first and put her safely in a cage and when the Apidea is full of bees run her in the hole in the top, they will recognize her so she should not be at risk. Open them up after 24 hours, if you have got mainly nurse bees they will remain with her. Be sure to put the little queen excluder slide over the entrance so she cannot depart.