

What to do if your colony is about to swarm

Swarm Prevention

Having a young queen and giving them new supers in good time to avoid them becoming congested will help to reduce the likelihood of swarms but not prevent them altogether. If you have no drawn comb supers to put on, then use foundation but remove the queen excluder until they have drawn out a few frames as they are reluctant to go up and will feel congested.

Swarm Control

If Queen cells are found containing small larvae or royal jelly when inspecting your colonies then you need to carry out some form of swarm control immediately. (If they are capped it is probably too late and the swarm has left, in which case thin to 1 large cell and leave her to hatch and mate). Three options are detailed below.

1. Pagden method modified

You need to find the queen. A spare hive is required.

It is an effective straightforward method, and can result in a new colony or recombine before the honey flow.

2. Nucleus method

You need to find the queen. A spare nuc is required.

Use if:

- you want to keep the old queen as insurance
- you want to start a new colony without depleting the main colony, ie. you still get a honey crop
- you want to move colony to another apiary as a nuc is easier to move
- you don't have a spare hive available.

3. Method if you cannot find the queen

A spare hive is required.

1. Swarm control – Pagden method modified

You will need:

Spare clean floor
Brood box with frames with foundation
Queen excluder
Crown board
Roof
Small feeder, rapid or contact

You are going to end up with a new hive on the old site with the queen and flying bees, and the old hive next to it with the house bees and queen cells.

If you wish to end up with one colony in time for the honey flow, move the parent hive just to one side with the entrance facing 90° away from its original orientation. If you wish to establish a second colony in the same apiary then move it to where you will want it.

Place the clean brood box complete fitted with frames and foundation on the clean floor on the original hive site. Call this colony the swarm.

Find the queen in the parent colony and transfer her along with a frame of brood in all stages of development and the bees covering it into the centre of the swarm box full of foundation. **Make sure there are no queen cells on the frame**, remove them if there are. Cover the brood box with a crown board and feed with 1:1 syrup if there is no nectar flow on so the bees can draw out the foundation. Finally add the roof. The flying bees will return here and form the artificial swarm. You may wish to put a queen excluder between floor and brood box for 3 or 4 days only, to prevent them from absconding.

Go through the parent hive and select one or two large queen cells with larvae and lots of royal jelly in, mark the frame with a drawing pin on the top bar above them. Destroy any sealed queen cells. You may need to shake or brush the bees off the frames but do not shake frames with your selected cells. Close up the frames and replace the missing frame with a frame of foundation at the side, but do not split up the brood area. If there were supers on the hive then these should be placed on the parent hive, over a queen excluder, as they will have lost all their foraging bees to the swarm on the original location. Finally add a crown board and roof.

Four to six days later, go through the frames in the parent hive and from your previously marked queen cells choose the largest dimpled one, removing all the rest and any new cells made in the meantime. Do not shake this frame, but part the bees or brush them off to make sure there are no queen cells left.

Make sure they have enough stores or add supers as necessary, then do not disturb the brood for at least a fortnight, while the queen is hatching and getting mated.

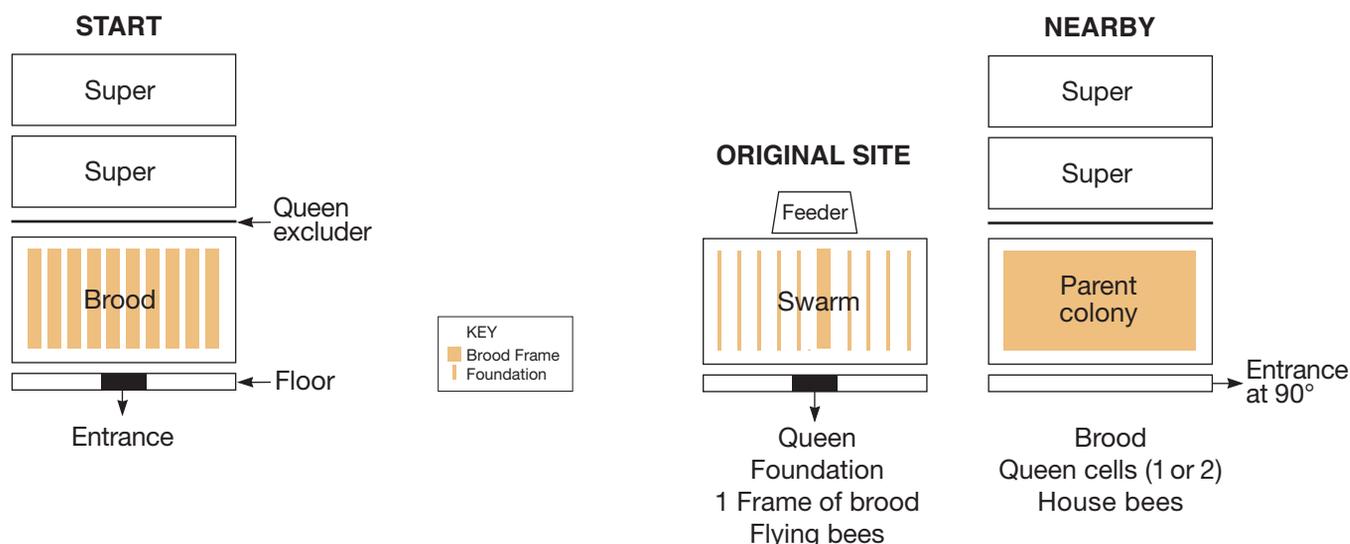
The swarm should be drawing out foundation. Continue to feed if there is no nectar flow, but don't overfeed, one litre of 1:1 every couple of days depending on size of colony should be sufficient. They need to have one or two frames of stores but no more or it will end up in the supers. When they have drawn out at least 9 or 10 frames you can start adding supers as required and stop feeding.

After 2-3 weeks, check that you have a laying queen in the parent hive. If there are no eggs but polished cells she may not have started laying so give her another week. Hopefully by then she will be laying.

If you plan to unite the colonies before the honey flow in July then move the entrances round so they are facing the same way (over the course of a couple of days). Assess the queen quality, find and dispose of the unwanted queen and unite by the newspaper method. In a few days you can rearrange the brood frames, keeping the best and recycling the rest.

If there is brood still on the old dark combs, put the unwanted brood frames in the original brood box above the queen excluder (with the queen below) and above any supers and in three weeks they will have hatched and the box can be removed.

Pagden method modified



2. Swarm control – Nucleus method

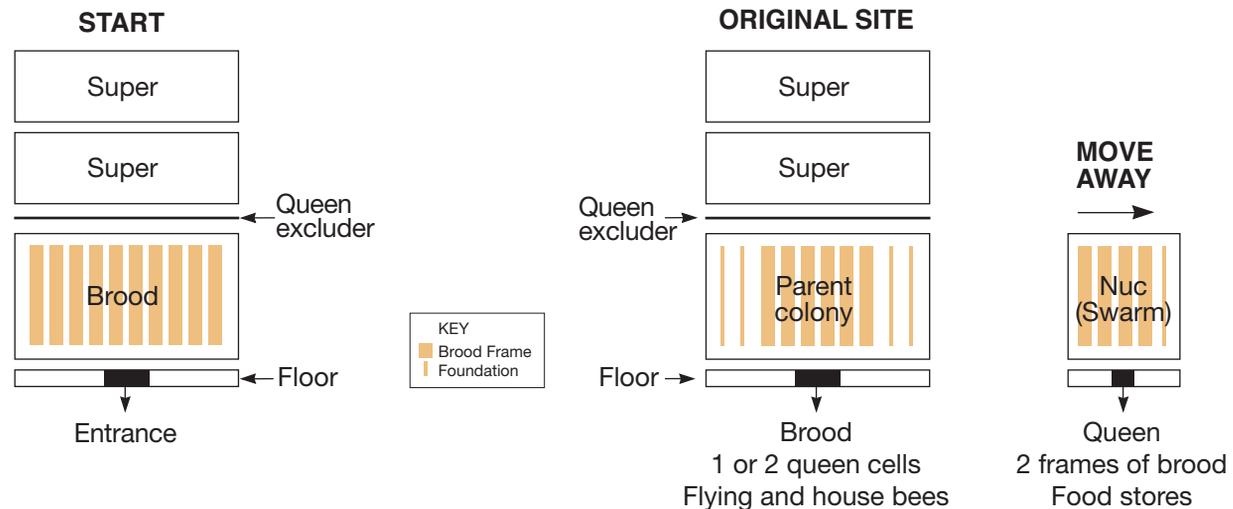
You will need:

- Nucleus
- Floor
- Crown board
- Roof
- 5 Frames with foundation

Find the queen, place her and the frame she is on plus one other frame of brood, destroying any queen cells on them, in a nucleus box. Add two frames of stores (pollen and honey) and put them on either side of the frame with the queen. Fill the remaining space with foundation. Go through the parent colony and select a good queen cell with larva and plenty of

royal jelly. Mark with a drawing pin on top of the frame. Shake the bees from two other frames into the nucleus. Do not shake the one with your selected cell. Close up the nucleus and stuff the entrance with grass. Move to another part of the apiary and feed if necessary. If the bees have not removed the grass from the entrance of the nucleus after 24 hours, remove it at dusk.

Destroy all the queen cells apart from your selected one in the parent colony. Close up the frames and make up the gap with foundation, but do not split the brood area. Reassemble hive. Check in 4 days that they have not made any further queen cells, then leave for 2-3 weeks for the queen to hatch and mate.



3. Swarm control – Method if you cannot find the queen

(modified from NBU FAQ18)

You will need:

- Spare clean floor
- Brood box with frames with foundation
- Queen excluder
- Crown board
- Roof
- Small feeder, rapid or contact

Move the parent colony to one side with the entrance facing 90° away from its original orientation. Put a new brood box and floor filled with drawn comb or foundation on the original site (the swarm). The flying bees will return here. Go through the parent and find a frame with eggs and young brood, remove any queen cells on it and put it with its bees in the middle of the swarm box. Thin the queen cells in the parent to one or two and make up the frames in the parent with drawn comb

or foundation. Leave supers on the parent. Feed the swarm to help them draw out the foundation if there is no nectar flow.

After 5-7 days check the swarm. If there are eggs and no queen cells then the queen is there. If there are queen cells then she is not there. Select one queen cell with a visible larva and destroy the rest.

In the parent colony if there are no eggs, the queen is probably not there, in which case the queen cells will be developing. Thin them to one good queen cell and leave for 2-3 weeks for her to hatch and mate. If there are eggs and young larvae then the queen is present, in which case destroy any queen cells. Without the foraging bees they are unlikely to swarm or make more cells, and may even have pulled down any queen cells themselves.

