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HOW TO FEED BEES

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Every beekeeper has to feed his bees at some time. He may feed them to keep them from starving or to stimulate them to rear brood. Stimulation of brood rearing is practical only in areas where the honey flow comes very early. In Utah we feed bees chiefly to keep them from starving.

The best way to feed your bees is to leave combs containing 50 or 60 pounds or more of honey with them when the honey crop is harvested. If you do this, you rarely will need to feed the bees during the following spring. Occasionally a poor season will not permit them to store even honey enough for winter. On the other hand, we sometimes take off more than we realize, or an unusual winter might cause the bees to consume more honey than usual. In either case, feeding becomes necessary. If we do not have extra combs of disease-free sealed honey, we should feed the bees sugar syrup.

Feed Them Sugar Syrup

For fall feeding in preparation for winter, we should use a thick syrup made by mixing two parts of sugar with one part of hot water, and stirring until completely dissolved. Syrup fed in the spring usually is a little thinner. Equal parts of sugar and water are recommended proportions. For stimulative feeding in spring an even thinner solution, two parts of water to one part of sugar, is used.

Kinds of Feeders

A large number of bee feeders have been devised. The simpler ones are the best and most commonly used. The Boardman entrance feeder is a block that can be inserted into the entrance of a hive. It holds an inverted canning jar which has several small holes punched in the lid, allowing syrup to escape only as fast as the bees consume it. The syrup is held in place by atmospheric pressure just as in poultry waterers. This feeder can be examined and refilled with no disturbance to the bees. Its main disadvantage is that in cool weather the bees will not go down to the entrance to get the syrup. You can get Boardman feeders from a bee supply firm.

Another feeder is in common use, which also utilizes the atmospheric-pressure principle, being made from a friction-top can, such as a 5 or 10 pound honey pail. Holes are punched in the lid with the point of a 3-penny nail. For slow stimulative feeding of thin syrup, two or three small hole will do. If you want the bees to take a lot of heavy syrup as fast as possible, 30 or 40 holes about 1/16 inch in diameter are necessary. When you fill the can with warm syrup, invert it over the frames and wrap a burlap sack around it to conserve the heat. Put an empty hive body over the cans with the hive cover on top. To feed a colony for winter, you can give the bees two or three cans at once. Some commercial beekeepers merely have a 3/4 inch hole in the cover and invert the can of syrup over it with a stone on top to hold it down when empty.

Another type of feeder used by some is the division board feeder. This is a water-tight box the size and shape of a frame, which bangs in a hive in place of a frame. It is usually left in place all year. When feeding is necessary, the hives are opened and syrup is poured into the feeders. A stick floating on the surface of the syrup prevents the bees from drowning.

Feeding Dry Sugar

Under some conditions we can safely feed bees dry sugar. This is one of the easiest ways to feed them. Spread a sheet of newspaper over the frames and punch a hole or two in it with a pencil. Pour on about 3 to 5 pounds of dry granulated sugar and spread evenly. Since the cover probably won't fit down over the sugar, it may be necessary to put a wooden frame or shallow super under the cover.

The best time to use dry sugar is early in the spring. In order to utilize the sugar, bees must be able to get water. If there isn't water in the hive from condensation, they must be able to fly every day and get it. Under these conditions, feeding dry sugar works well and avoids excitement. Robbing sometimes is associated with feeding sugar syrup.