

March's To Do's

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March is a critical "starvation month" as colonies begin rearing brood, which requires more energy than they may have in stored honey. Beekeepers must balance high-energy feeding with the unpredictable late-winter weather.

Check on your hives: Alive or Dead?

Is there evidence of live bees? Hopefully you have watched for bees flying on warmer days. Perhaps you have done some early feeding inside the hive?

YES you see live bees! 🐝 – Fire up your smoker. Moving On....

- If you used a sugar board, to what extent has it been used? – It may be left on for a while yet. – Once removed any hard sugar should be saved for making sugar syrup.
- **Emergency Feeding:** This is the most vital task. Heavily feed colonies that feel light. Use **1:1 sugar syrup** only if temperatures are consistently above 50°F; otherwise, use **pollen patties** or **candy boards**.
- *Remember: You're smoking as needed and moving SLOWLY. – Follow best practices for examining frames*
- Check for brood: Hopefully there is much brood on multiple frames. (Preferably ambient temperatures should be 55 deg or above. Keep exposure to cool temperatures to a minimum)/
- If possible, move brood to bottom brood chamber. Maintain the order of the brood frames side-to-side, as well as above-below, if more than one box is involved.
- Treat for mites! 🕷️. – Options include
 - Apivar strips. Follow directions (The are “artificial chemicals” so if you are uncomfortable with this, then...)
 - Oxalic Acid Vapor. – Follow instructions
 - There are other options.
- If you plan to “checkerboard” based on Growth-Degree Days. – See comments elsewhere.

NO Bees 😞 – You have a Dead Out

- First... **Don't be discouraged!** All beekeepers loose bees over winter. – Particularly New Beekeepers. – This is a learning Experience.
 - Do Not throw things away. Most, if not All of the equipment can be reused! – It may look bad to you, the bees like “used”. 😞
 - The only exception is if foul-brood is present and this is highly unlikely. (Check with someone who knows)
 - In some ways “experienced” equipment is better than new. – It has that “honey-bee lived-in” smell.
- Remove frames and clean them, replacing foundation if needed.
 - Is there Mouse nest? – If yes make a note to use mouse guards next fall 😊.
 - Wax foundation likely has been destroyed, this needs to be replaced.
 - Plastic foundation is less susceptible to damage, but replace as needed

- Mice chewed on wooden frames? Frame is reusable unless its structural integrity has been compromised.
- Foundation: Lightly brush off dead bees and other detritus.
 - OK to leave “bee parts” in cells. New worker bees will take care of them. – It gives them something to do. 😊
 - Mold: Some is acceptable. – Bees will clean this up.
 - Replace damaged foundation or any that very old and very dark.
 - Some darkness is OK. These have been used for brood rearing
 - VERY Dark, thick cell walls are best replaced.
- Scrape off propolis, particularly at contact points.
 - Be sure to clean contact point between frames. This will make hive management much easier later in the spring.
 - It comes off easier at cooler temperatures. –
 - Keep it off floors, it is hard to remove once warm.

Prepare Supers for the Spring Nectar Flow!

- At a minimum at least 2 supers per hive.
 - Combs with drawn foundation are fine.
 - Mix in new foundation frames as well
 - Avoid mixing wax and plastic foundation frames.
- For an existing/surviving colony – **add supers when first dandelions appear.**
- **Swarm Prep:** Prepare swarm traps with lures (like lemongrass oil) to be ready for placement in April.
- Once Nectar Flow Begins – Keep close tabs on the supers!
 - Bees not having room to expand honey storage area will start filling cells in the brood area (backfilling). This limits egg laying and future brood development.
 - May also increase likelihood of swarming.

Natural Indicators in Indiana

- **Blooms:** Watch for **hazelnut** and **henbit** early in the month, followed by **dandelions** in mid-to-late March, which provide essential early pollen.
- **Bee Activity:** Observe the hive entrance for bees returning with pollen loads—a sign that the queen has resumed egg-laying.

Not sure? – Check with an experienced beekeeper.