

# Bee-Havior

## Care and Installation of Package Bees

By Stacy Hill, Kelley Employee and Beekeeper

If you are an established beekeeper and can use drawn combs on which to install your package you should do so. If you can just give them two or three drawn combs it is a big advantage. This allows the bees to get to work without having to draw combs from the foundation first.

### Four Important Points

1. Feed package bees heavily until the colony is well established. Sugar and water mixed in a ratio of 1 part water to 1 part sugar, or high fructose corn syrup works well. This is for spring feeding. Consider using a feeding stimulant like Honey B Healthy that is added to your sugar water and treating with Fumigilin B for prevention of nosema.
2. Keep entrances reduced to a small size. This prevents robbing and conserves heat.
3. Do not add supers or a second hive body until the bees draw out 7 of the 10 frames.
4. Do hive inspections to check the condition of the new hive, on a weekly basis, until the hive is well established.

### Care of the Package on Arrival

If weather conditions are poor when the package arrives, you can hold the package for several days in a dark room or basement where the temperature is close to 50° F. You should feed the bees in the package by using a clean spray bottle to mist with a mixture of sugar and water (50/50) on the screen of the cage and allow the bees to gorge themselves. You should repeat this process morning and night. If you do not do this, the sugar syrup in the can shipped with the package can go dry and your bees will starve. Bees die of heat quickly—do not leave them in the sun or in a place that is hot.

### Installation of Packages

Install the package late in the afternoon. This helps prevent drifting. It is well to mist a little syrup on the screen of the cage 15 minutes before you are ready to move them to the hive for installation. This quiets them down and they will be better natured. There are several ways of installing a package of bees. We recommend the following methods.



A couple newbees install their bees via the shake method.

## Method 1

Remove one frame from your hive. Store the frame in a dry cool place. This frame will be put back into your hive several days later. Tap the cage lightly a few times on the ground to jar all the bees to the bottom of the cage. Do not let queen the cage slip down into the cage. With a firm grip on the can, remove it, pull the queen cage out of the package and immediately return the square lid to the hole of the cage. This prevents the bees from getting out.

Now that the queen cage is removed, inspect your queen to make sure she is alive and in good condition. Carefully remove the cork from the candy end of the queen cage. The bees will release the queen from the cage by eating the candy (it usually takes a few days for them to do this). You may choose to take a small nail and make a hole through the candy. This will help release the queen sooner.

Place the queen cage, screen side facing up, between frames 5 & 6 in the hive body. Again, tap the package lightly a few times on the ground to jar all the bees to the bottom of the cage. Remove the square lid and begin to gently shake the bees from the package over the tops of the frames and the queen cage. Once you have shaken the bees from the package, place the inner cover over the hive upside down. You can now close up your hive with the top cover. Once you have shaken the bees from the package and closed up the hive, place the package on the ground in front of the hive so that the few remaining bees can fly out and into the hive. You will need to feed your bees on a regular basis. We suggest using a Boardman entrance feeder with package bees to prevent drowning. You can open the can of syrup that came with the package and use the remaining syrup to feed with.

In about three days, you will want to go into the hive to make sure the queen has been released and is alive. If she is still inside the cage, you can choose to leave her there a day or two longer or release her yourself. To do this, hold the queen cage down inside the hive body and carefully pull back the screen to release her. Remove the queen cage and place the frame you removed before installation back inside the hive body box and return the inner and outer cover.

## Method 2

With this method, you do not have to shake the bees from the package. Follow the same procedures as Method 1, except remove five frames from your hive. Place the queen cage, screen side facing up, between frames 2 & 3 in the hive body. Again, tap the cage lightly a few times on the ground to jar all the bees to the bottom of the cage. Remove the square lid and place the package down inside the hive body in the space of the frames you have removed. In about three days, make sure the queen has been released and is alive. Remove the queen cage and package and place the five frames you removed before installation back inside the hive body box and return the inner and outer cover. ◆



While Newbee Pete struggles to remove the cork, the worker bees investigate their new home & caretakers.



Bees don't typically get this excited during an install, but these ladies were! It was probably due to a combo of warm humid weather & a long ride from Kentucky.



Stacy shipping your package bees!