



# IF YOUR BEES SWARM

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You certainly don't want your colony to swarm. But you *do* want to encourage lots of bees for the big nectar flow. So you do all the things you can to grow your colony and to prevent the bees from splitting and leaving (thereby creating a swarm). But despite your best intentions, your hive might swarm. It happens to the best beekeepers. There is some good news...you may be able to capture your swarm and start another colony! You wanted that new hive of bees anyway.

It's great to have that additional hive -- but it is here that trouble can begin. You know, of course, that your swarm took the *old* mother Queen with them when they left the parent hive. She is now in your new hive heading up that colony until they supercede her with a new young queen. Be sure not to destroy

any Queen cells in the new hive. The bees need these to replace the old Queen when they are ready. What about the *parent hive*? Here is the place where the troubles really begin if the beekeeper does not follow through properly and on time.

For sure we know that when the bees swarmed, they left behind several queen cells. We also know that there is normally only one queen in a colony. So when the first Queen does emerge from these cells, her first move is to destroy the other Queens in their cells. If two queens emerge at the same time they battle it out till there is only one. Exciting stuff. Two or three days later, the remaining Queen (a virgin) flies away to get mated. She can make eggs, but must have the sperm from the drones in order to lay *fertilized* eggs. She flies to a "Drone Congregating Area". No fooling, that's the true term given to this place where Drones mill about a couple a hundred feet in the air waiting for queens.

After mating with several Drones, the queen goes home. You better hope she does so. If she doesn't make it back, your colony is *hopelessly queenless*. There are no eggs in the hive for the bees to make a Queen. There is no Queen Pheromone to *inhibit* the worker bee's ovaries from developing. And develop they do. Now you have a colony that will eventually die, with Laying Workers who can only lay eggs that will become drones. Disaster!

So what to do to prevent tragedy?

After a colony swarms, the beekeeper must inspect the hive at the proper time to determine if it is Queen-Right. Does it have a Queen? *Look for eggs* (one egg per cell). The laying workers usually put *more* than one egg in a cell, so you will know the difference. When do you check? A week after the swarm, take a look in the hive. Chance is you won't see a queen or eggs yet -- but check! Most often you must allow two weeks to pass before checking. But don't wait beyond that time to look for the eggs (finding eggs signifies the presence of a queen). After the swarm, it took 6 to 8 days for the queen cell to open and a new queen to emerge. Then allow about 3 days for her to mate. When she returns, she will start laying eggs in about 3 days.

If a beekeeper does not follow up after a colony has swarmed, it can easily become a queenless colony. If the beekeeper was not aware that a swarm had occurred, a regular inspection during the month of May would have revealed the situation. Know the indicators: no eggs, less bees, all cells have older larvae and/or capped brood, plus loads of honey.