

Apis m. Esoteria 4

Package expansion

Get your packages of bees ordered! Right now (Dec.) the bee producers are filling orders for the migrating pollinators. Those colonies need to be double hive bodies **FULL** of bees by the second week of February. That tells you how long it takes for a well-tended package to grow to working level population. Roughly, 10- 12 weeks of heavy supplemental food, medication, and blooming flowers.

The blooming flowers is the weak part of the equation here in the mountains. We start to collect excess honey when the blooms are just starting to hit their peak with the blackberry bloom the middle of May (maybe). This means we have to heavily supplement feed to get the young package queens up to full production.

One trick I use is to use a double package for each new colony. That is one package with a queen and one package without a queen. Then I combine them in a 10-frame hive body. There are about 3500 honey bees to the pound. So, a three-pound package has 10,500, times two is a colony starting with 21,000 bees. A good single deep brood chamber full of bees is about 30,000 bees. This means I am starting my new colony with as many bees as a good wintered over colony.

The queen will only lay eggs as fast as her colony can tend to them. Usually, the package must draw comb and then raise brood. This is a very slow process with only 3 pounds of honeybees.

Your package comes with a mix of ages of bees. Some foragers and varying ages of nurse bees. The colony that is “shaken” to collect your package has already been “shaken” several times before our delivery at the end of March. Hence, we get more nurse bees (young) than foragers. This slows the food collection and comb drawing down. And, subsequently the colony expansion.