

Apis m. Esoteria 4b

After You Pick Up Your Package/Nuc

Now that you have your package home and are ready to install it, what is Next?

Inspect the package. Do the bees look calm? Lack of food in transit can agitate them. Some dead bees (up to a couple of hundred) can be normally acceptable.

I spray the outside of the cage (both sides) lightly with sugar syrup. This calms the bees. I spray the inside of the receiving hive and the underside of the inner cover with syrup. This will encourage the bees to stay in the hive body. I close the front entrance but make sure there is air circulation. With solid bottom boards close the entrance with a strip of window screen. With a screened bottom board, you can close the front with foam rubber strips made from foam from craft section at Wal Mart.

When you remove the queen cage from the shipping cage, INSPECT TO ENSURE THERE IS A QUEEN AND SHE IS ALIVE. This should be done the day you pick up the packages. If there is a problem with the queen, you should notify the shipper immediately. If you wait 2-3 days, there is no recourse back to the shipper. If you wait 5 days to inspect the queen and she is dead in the queen cage, how does the shipper know that you handled her and installed her correctly.

Sometimes the shipper has extra queens to replace ones that died during shipment. A queen can be damaged during capture and installation in her queen cage.

If you cannot install your package the day you pick them up from the shipper, there is no practical recourse back to the shipper. Maybe you stored them in too hot of a place? Maybe they needed feed or water? Maybe they got too cold? There are just too many maybe's about handling the bees.

Now the more practical action you can take! If you have a dead or missing queen and do not discover it the first day you install the bees in their permanent hive, combine those bees with another hive. This will save the package of worker bees. It gives you time to locate and install a new queen. Even if this is 24 to 48 hours. The bees are so confused from shipment that they will combine quite readily. Also, worker bees tend to just work themselves to death if the queen is missing.

If they have syrup, they will draw comb and make honey just as they should until the colony collapses due to too few workers.

If you only have one package of bees and no other colony to combine them with, close them up in a well-ventilated hive body with a syrup feeder. The bees can get along for several days closed up. This would be normal to the bees during a week of heavy rain. You can usually buy and ship a queen in 3-4 days if necessary.

NOW, this is where being a member of the local bee club comes in handy. Having a very experienced mentor also helps. A queen can be procured locally from an established hive. Just capture the queen and move here to the package without a queen. She needs to be installed correctly and slowly (over 2-3 days at the longest) to ensure that the package will accept her. The loosing colony will grow a new queen. This is one use of "repair parts Nucs".

You can be bold, based on your experience level. One technique for queen installation is heavily smoke (bar-bee-que) the gaining colony. This will confuse them and kill all other pheromone smells. Then just take the queen and throw her into the receiving colony. If you move the queen in a "queen catcher cage" you can test how readily she will be accepted. The package has no Queen Mandibular Pheromone (QMP). They are missing their queen. Lay the queen catcher on the top bars of the receiving colony. See if the bees cluster calmly on the queen catcher or attack it. Generally speaking, if the bees are calm, they will readily accept that queen. You can either release her then or leave the catcher cage in the hive for a few hours to days and then release her.

If you have purchased a nuc don't blindly accept that everything is okay inside that box. Yes, the seller inspected to make sure she was laying a good brood pattern. He also probably treated the nuc for mites. DID THE QUEEN GET SQUISHED during this process? Once you have set or installed the nuc in your apiary and the bees are calmed down (usually on that first day), you can open the nuc box and inspect thoroughly the entire colony. This tells you how many days you have before that colony will swarm. An over full nuc colony can swarm before you know it. If the swarming instinct has already started, moving the nuc into a 10-frame brood box may not stop the swarming process.

In this case place an empty frame (comb or foundation) in the center of the 5 nuc frames so the queen recognizes the empty space. Close the entrance with a

ventilated closure. If the queen cannot swarm and the conditions inside the hive improve and at just the right time in the early stages of swarming the queen will restart laying eggs and not swarm.

If you miss this point and the queen cells continue to develop, the worst thing that will happen is the new virgin queen will hatch out and kill the old queen. This sounds terrible but it is not. You have just saved that colony from losing 40-60% of the worker bees who would have followed that queen out in a swarm.

This increased population will continue to build the comb and store honey in the hive. This will accelerate the development of the colony once the new virgin queen comes back mated.

A nuc that swarms will have so few foragers left behind that it will be severely retarded in building out the comb and storing honey.