

## Mehalick Action Plan New Beekeeping Calendar

This calendar is for my area, which is central Prince Georges County in Maryland. It was developed to help new beekeepers have a more successful beekeeping experience, and understand what the basic work with the hives should be. This calendar takes into account a single nectar flow starting in late April, ending in Early June. First swarms usually April 15<sup>th</sup>. We have tough bee conditions, and must adapt to them for local conditions.

Disclaimer: we follow 90% of the certified naturally grown guidelines. This means being proactive against varroa, using IPM methods such as drone pulls, screened bottom boards, SHB traps, freeman trays with diamoaceous earth and regular monitoring of varroa levels before treating. This is reflected in this calendar.

These are only guidelines, the bees will tell you what to do and when. Every year is different.

Create your action plan. Sit down and make a plan for how you would ideally handle your hives this year. This is ideal beekeeping. Life, work, family do not interfere. The weather is always wonderful, and the bees are always happy. This planning step will allow you to adequately plan your resources, money spending and time allocations. Set your goals for the year

With beekeeping you have to listen to the bees and adjust. Do not become regimented to the following date suggestions. They are suggestions/only guidelines, the bees will tell you what to do and when. Every year is different.

Keep records of your hives, using the system of your choice. Each hive inspection is worth a note of: whether the hive is queen right, presence of pests, brood/food state.

As a new beekeeper you should

1. Feel free to keep going into the hives, until you are comfortable doing it. That may take 2 visits, it may take 20. This first year, you need to learn more than you need to “not disturb the bees” It would be great to limit yourself to going weekly in your hive. Take advantage of other beekeepers and visit their hives too!
2. Feel free to wear any protective gear you want, without worrying about “what I saw on beesource, youtube or anything else”. Yes I know some beekeepers work without veils and gloves and jackets. That is not the norm for first year people, but it does make for some great youtube video.\*\*\*\*
3. Feel free to use the resources available to you. Talk to people. Your Local club is here to help. Use the [bumbabees.com/forums](http://bumbabees.com/forums) to ask questions
4. Beekeeping is local. Take the internet advice with a grain of salt. The three month, all summer long nectar flow in Upstate NY is not the 5 week, early spring flow of Maryland.
5. Your assigned mentor is available CALL THEM, EMAIL THEM. They want you to succeed. You are not alone.
6. Scott Seccomb gives you permission to “Experiment”.

### CALENDAR DEPENDENT SCHEDULE

1. Check varroa levels monthly. I prefer the alcohol wash. Any count over 5 mites per 100 bees needs treatment now. You should have a varroa mitigation plan that works for you.
2. Remove drone brood every 21 days, starting in Early April depending on your hive
3. Keep your water source filled and available
4. Keep a small hive beetle trap in the top box of your hive, on the sunny side, near the outside edge. We also use Swiffer pads at the inner cover, and top of frames.
5. Keep 1:1 on your hive until your brood boxes have drawn frames. Then STOP feeding.
6. Use an interior feeder. Boardman feeders in the front entrance of the hive are ONLY FOR WATER

## **March/April/May**

Install your package or Nuc. The instructions remain almost the same for either type.

Keep 1:1 on the hive UNTIL your brood box is drawn. This means 2 deep boxes, or 3 medium boxes of drawn frames. After the first box, use a follower board to add empty foundation. It helps to draw out the comb better, and allows you to stay with only giving the bees as much space as they can manage.

Use the Lee Travis Pillowcase technique to reduce the bees flying about while inspecting your hive

Consider putting on a robbing screen from the very beginning. You will have a weak hive until it grows this first year.

If you start with an overwintered nuc, you might get a honey harvest your first year. Once the brood boxes are drawn, remove all 1:1 feed and add a honey super.

Consider hanging a wasp/hornet/moth trap near your hives. We make one with a two liter soda bottle using <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/waxmothtrap.html> It has been very effective.

Consider buying a piece of plywood and making a nucleus colony box. The plans for a simple one are at <http://beesource.com/build-it-yourself/5-frame-nuc-d-coates-version/> It makes four nuc boxes, do it with a friend, and keep two each. They make great quiet boxes to hold queens when you are doing inspections, and can also be a good swarm trap.

## **June**

Continue varroa checks and drone pulls. Check regularly for back filled brood nests. Tilt box up looking for swarm cells. The goal is to add real estate so the bees do not swarm, if you see queen cells your hive is getting ready to swarm. Talk to your mentor on how to resolve the situation.

We enter the dearth - ie. No large nectar sources beginning in mid/late June. The bees do not have incoming resources, and begin to become more defensive of their hives.

Add robbing screens now, if you do not already have them in place. Maggie Mills says she sees basswood in late June, I do not.

## **July**

This is when most beekeepers take their honey crop. You will not be taking a crop this year. Instead you now will acknowledge from this point forward the bees will NOT DRAW COMB.

Take your honey crop if you have an overwintered nuc. Be sparing. We like to see 90% capped on the frames. If you have Italians leave 70-80 pounds on the hive. Once honey crop is taken, this is usually when I treat for varroa to get ready for making winter bees if the counts show a need.

Once the Nectar Dearth begins your bees will evolve into a different behavior. In my house we lovingly call it "Pissy bee syndrome" They become more defensive of their resources. We usually highly limit the amount of time we leave a hive open to reduce setting off a robbing incident. Any inspections are quick and to the point.

## **August**

Bees naturally switch over to creating winter bees now, following nature's clues. Typically we start some 1:1 feed on low stores hives to get them strong for brood raising. This is particularly needed by Italians who love warm weather and makes lots of babies even in the dearth.

Final chance to requeen is August. This is when you decide how you want to progress. Do you want a newly mated purchased queen? Did your bees supersede or replace the queen they arrived with? If so you have a nice young queen for the winter. Is your current queen a real winner, that you are taking through the winter?

## **September-October**

By early September switch to 2:1 if you are still feeding

In Late September, rearrange your hives to bring the brood all down into your bottom brood box. Bring all the brood together so the cluster starts together and is not forced to split cluster to cover brood. Honey stores go in the upper brood boxes.

Mouse guards go on. (Make sure the mice are not already in place)

This is the most dangerous period for re-infection with Varroa. Your strong hive, finds a dead out and brings it home. Be suspicious if your hive gets full of honey during this time. Our goldenrod flow is not that strong. Your robbing bees will be dead by spring if you do not treat again after they have become infected. This year we will be switching to varroa testing every two weeks during this time period.

Insulate your hives in late October if you choose to use it. In Maryland most do not. Add a moisture quilt on the top box. We have successfully used candy boards. Candy boards have traditionally given us our personal best overwintering. Charlie Brandts uses hay in the top box as an insulator.

## **November-December**

Use a hand held IR thermometer to track your cluster location without opening your hives.

## **January**

Check for food needs by popping the top and looking down the inner cover on any day over 45 Degrees. This is NOT a hive inspection, but a quick peek. Do not pull frames. If your bees are on the inner cover add FONDANT or a sugar block NOW on the cluster.

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If it is over 50 degrees, consider adding a pollen patty starting in mid-Feb to help the hive grow. [We do not use them, the skunk cabbage is coming in by mid Feb. and small hive beetles love pollen patties]

Start liquid 1:1 feed over the inner cover once days are regularly over 32 degrees

March 1

**Congratulations you have overwintered your hive....**

“If you don’t have a Varroa Mitigation plan, you are planning to fail”

Dr. Dennis Van Engeldorp

Current varroa treatment recommendations from Dr. Dennis Van Engeldorp, as of 2/17/18 are:

Spring: Amitraz

Summer: Formic acid

Fall: Thymol, then trickle oxalic acid as needed

Check the varroa treatment chart from Toni Burnham, and recognize the temperature limits on the treatments. Note that we cannot use Mite away quick strips in summer in Maryland it is TOO HOT. The take away is choose how you will treat whether varroa mites by IPM, soft treatments or hard treatments and have a Varroa mitigation plan.

Personally, here at house Mehalick, we use regular drone pulls, and those have proven effective enough to reduce our need to treat until when the honey is pulled or even not until early fall. We do monitor our hives mite loads regularly, and monitor EACH hive, not a sampling.

\*\*\*\* I will not let people work around my hives in my yard, without a veil. A direct bee sting on the eye can cause damage. If you want to go without gloves or a jacket or shoes No problem. What you choose to do for yourself at your yard is your own business.