

# Caring for and Installation of Package Bees

By John Johnson

Package bees are easily transported by automobile. While in transit they need a temperature of approximately 60 to 70°F. Package bees can smother or chill if they are placed in a tight, hot or cold location. The inside of an automobile or cab of a pickup where temperature is in the 60°F range is about right.

Soon after the bees arrive at their final destination and while still in the screened wire cage – feed them. Prepare a mixture of 1/2 clean water and 1/2 table-quality sugar.\* Using a spray bottle, spray the sugar solution on the package screen. It will disappear quickly. Give a second feeding.

Get the bees from their package into their hive the same day you get them, if possible. If you need to keep them in the package overnight or for a day or two, place them where the temperature is in the 60–70°F range and out of bright light. Feed sugar water every 8–10 hours until hived.

It is preferred that bees be hived when the outside temperature is 50°F or warmer. It is best to hive them during late afternoon. Do not hive them after dark.

## Hiving package bees

Have the hive in which package bees will be placed ready before you plan to hive them. Equipment needed is: bottom board, hive body, 8-10 frames of foundation or drawn comb (preferred), inner cover, outer cover, entrance reducer, hive stand, feeder bucket with sugar water and a second empty hive body or something similar to enclose the feeder bucket. Of course, a frame or two of good honey is the best feed for package bees but beginning beekeepers will rarely have combs of honey available.

## To install the bees into hive, proceed as follows:

- First, with the spray bottle feed the bees the 1:1 sugar solution.
- Remove four frames from the center of the hive body in which the package bees will be placed.
- With moderate force, bang the package of bees on the ground. This disorients the bees and keeps them in the screened package after the cover and feed container are removed.
- With your hive tool, pry the cover off the feeder can and remove the feeder can and queen cage.
- Place the queen (in her cage) in your pocket or some warm, safe place.
- Hold the package of bees over the center of the hive body. Shake it until all the bees are out of the screened package. Most of the bees will fall out of the package into the hive. A few will fly around, but they will find their way into the hive in due time.
- Wait a few minutes for the bees to begin climbing onto the frames of foundation or drawn comb.
- Replace the four frames you previously removed in a step above.

## Proceed as follows to install the queen in the beehive:

- If your queen came in a wooden cage, remove the cork from the candy end of the queen cage. If you receive a California-style queen cage, you may need to remove the cork and place the black plastic candy filled tube in its place.\*\*
- Using a medium-sized nail, poke two or three holes completely through the queen cage candy (this will allow the queen to be released sooner). Be careful not to injure the queen.
- Next, in the middle of the hive spread two frames apart and with the candy end down and the screened side of the queen cage facing the front or back of hive, lodge the queen cage tightly between the two frames – preferably slightly towards one or the other ends, so that it is not directly under the middle of the inner cover, where you will be feeding the bees and sugar water will be dripping down.\*\*\*
- *The screen side of the queen cage must be located so the bees have contact with the queen while they are in the process of eating the candy out and releasing her.* The queen cage must be lodged tightly in place so it does not fall to the bottom of the hive.

- If there are any bees left in the package that the bees came in, leave it on the ground in front of the hive. The bees will find their way out and into the hive. You usually can remove it the next day or so)

**Next:**

- Place the inner cover on the hive.
- Place the feeder container over the hole in the inner cover.
- Put an empty hive body or something similar around the feeder to keep it in place.
- Put the outer cover over the top of the feeder container and something heavy on top of the outer cover.
- Put the entrance reducer in place.
- **Do not disturb the hive for five days.**
- After five days, the queen should be out of the cage. If she is not, using a nail, remove the remaining candy and place the queen cage back where it was previously located. She is now free to move out of the cage and will do so.
- If you have started the hive on foundation only, the bees should be building comb (cells) and the queen will lay eggs as soon as cells are available.

**After the acceptance period**

It is essential that feed be continually kept on the bees until you are sure they have stored enough to maintain themselves. Thus, check and refill the feeder container every several days.

If, after the release period, you see that the bees are not taking sugar water, it may indicate an issue with the queen. Check the hive, looking for eggs. *You do not need to find the queen to know the colony is queen right.* Once you find eggs you can stop looking, close the hive. The presence of eggs shows that the queen was laying within the last 3 days and the hive is more than likely OK.

Do not let the feeder container be empty as long as the bees need feed. Continue to feed the bees as long as they use what you provide. When adequate nectar from plants is available, bees will no longer take sugar water and you are through feeding. Remove the feeder container and the extra hive body.

\*This is a 1:1 sugar solution: 1-gallon water to 8 pounds table sugar. If heating the water, do so before adding the sugar and do not heat it after adding sugar.

\*\*Your queen should be the only bee inside the queen cage. All attendants (worker bees) if they are with the queen should be removed prior to placing the queen in the hive.

\*\*\*If there is not enough space with all the frames in the hive, remove an outer frame from the hive and leave it out until you remove the queen cage, which will be many days later. The need to do this depend on the style of wooden cage the queen is in and the width of your frames.

\*\*\*\*If your queen comes in a plastic JZB-style cage, place the queen cage with the candy end down, below the bottom of the top bar of a frame, pushing it into the wax. Place it with the screened portions of the cage facing the front and back of the hive just as described above for the wooden queen cages, not towards the wax, so the worker bees can communicate and feed the queen. Push the frames together so the other side of the queen cage is also embedded in the wax.

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