BLYTHEWOOD BEE CO.

12 MONTHS OF BEEKEEPING IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Just as bees have seasonal activities, you as a beekeeper should as well. Here's a general plan for each month of the year with activities that will keep your hive healthy and producing. This calendar should be used as a guide for beekeeping activities in South Carolina; however, seasons vary. If spring in any given year is colder later, or if winter ends early, activities may need to shift. Talk to seasoned local beekeepers for the timing that works best in your area.

WINTER

January, February, March

During the cold, bees will remain in the hive. They're not foraging, and their winter stores could be running low. Colony inspections can be performed on warmer days of 45-50°. At that temperature, bees will take cleansing flights.

SPRING

April, May, June

Nectar flow is heavy, and the bees are active. Swarming activity is at an all-time high. Queen cells are hatching. Drones are fully mature and on the hunt.

SUMMER

July, August, September

Bees will cluster outside the hive to cool off during the hot and humid days of July. The hive will require extra ventilation.

FALL

October, November, December

Bee activity is reduced as cold weather sets in. On warm days (45-50° or warmer), watch for bees foraging for pollen and making cleansing flights.

WINTER

JANUARY

During the cold, bees will remain in the hive. They're not foraging, and their winter stores could be running low. Colony inspections can be performed on warmer days of 45-50°. At that temperature, bees will take cleansing flights.

- Lay pollen supplement on top of the frames over the "winter cluster" of bees.
- Feed with syrup in a feeder and/or use fondant if honey stores are low.
- Clear snow and dead bees from the entrance area when needed and check for proper ventilation.
- Clean, repair, order and build equipment for the upcoming season.
- Move hives if you intend to relocate them for the upcoming season.
- Order nucs, if you have not already done so.
- Use this time to increase your knowledge base – read, watch videos, take a class, etc.
- Combine hives when the queen has failed and/or when a colony is small.
- Treat for Nosema disease, if needed, especially if the weather has been too cold for bees to undergo cleansing flights.

FEBRUARY

Hive checks, performed on days with temperatures that are 45-50° or higher, should reveal that brood building is underway.

- Continue non-hive activities – increase knowledge, combine or move hives, repair/replace equipment, etc.
- Continue to feed with syrup in a feeder if honey stores are low.
- Replace frames (no more than four at a time) containing excess drone cells and/or old comb.
- Make a thorough inspection of hives, looking for pests/diseases, such as varroa mites, European foulbrood and American foulbrood. If treatment is required, make sure all medications are removed by times specified on labels.
- After inspection of brood pattern, order a queen if the current queen is failing.

MARCH

Swarm activity begins.

- Initiate swarm prevention measures – split hives, remove queen cells, etc. Set up bait hives, just in case.
- Add another hive body to provide room for the queen to lay to help prevent swarming. Alternatively, if the bottom hive body is all but empty (as the colony moves up), reverse the bottom two or three boxes, being careful not to divide clusters of brood.
- Feed syrup in the feeder if honey stores are low.
- Continue to watch for pests/diseases. If treatment is required, make sure all medications are removed by times specified on labels.

- After inspection of brood pattern, order a queen if the current queen is failing.
- Add new honey supers when the hive body is full of bees.
- Remove all medications from the hive towards the end of the month (before the heavy honey flow), unless they are essential, i.e. the bees would not survive without it.

SPRING

APRIL

Nectar flow is heavy, and the bees are active. Swarming activity is at an all-time high. Queen cells are hatching. Drones are fully mature and on the hunt.

- Continue swarm capture and prevention measures.
- Ensure that the flight path is clear.
- Trim shrubs and cut down weeds, as necessary.
- Be prepared to add new supers to keep up with the bees' activity.
- Examine brood pattern and replace the queen, if necessary.
- Apart from weak or new hives, remove feeders.
- If bees are not very active, examine the hives to determine the cause/problem. Time to install new nucs. Plant annuals for future pollen and nectar supplementation.

MAY

Honey flow remains heavy. Swarming activity continues

- Continue swarm capture and prevention measures.
- Be prepared to add new supers to keep up with the bees' activity.
- If more than 20 adult hive beetles are seen in the hive, install hive beetle traps.
- Set up bee watering stations in the apiary.
- Check for and replace failing queens.

JUNE

Honey flow continues if honey sources are available. As it slows, the queen will lay fewer eggs. Bees continue to swarm if they become overcrowded.

- Be prepared to add new supers to keep up with the bees' activity.
- Continue swarm capture and prevention measures.
- Remove and extract fully capped honey. Return wet supers late in the day to limit robbing activities.
- Begin late-season splits. Feed all splits even if nectar is available.
- Continue hive beetle measures.
- Keep water stations available and filled.

SUMMER

JULY

Bees will cluster outside the hive to cool off during the hot and humid days of July. The hive will require extra ventilation.

- Always keep an empty super on top.
- Remove and extract fully capped honey. Return wet supers late in the day to limit robbing activities. Leave at least one full super of honey for the bees.
- Perform late-season splits. Feed all splits even if nectar is available.
- Continue hive beetle measures.
- Keep water stations available and filled.
- Replace failing queens.
- Begin varroa mite assessment and treat if needed.

AUGUST

The honey flow is coming to an end. The hive population is beginning to drop. Mite levels are high, making evaluations necessary. Because nectar is scarce, robbing activities can become a problem.

- Remove and extract fully capped honey. Return wet supers late in the day to limit robbing activities. Leave at least one full super of honey for the bees.
- Add entrance reducers or robbing screens, if needed on weak colonies.
- Perform varroa mite assessment and treat if required.
- Keep water stations available and filled.
- Feed pollen supplement and syrup to weak colonies.
- Last chance to replace failing queen; therefore, assess her performance carefully.
- Equalize colonies.

SEPTEMBER

The queen is laying fewer eggs, and the hive populations continue to drop. Drones begin to disappear from the hive. Pollen, if fed, should be fed dry in outside feeders or mixed with syrup due to hive beetle activity.

- Be on the lookout for robber bees and add entrance reducers or robbing screens, if needed.
- Feed pollen and syrup, if needed.
- Combine hives when the queen has failed and/or colony is small.
- Perform varroa mite assessment and treat if needed.

FALL

OCTOBER

Continue to combine hives when the queen has failed and/or colony is small/weak. Make sure all queens are present and accepted. Colonies lacking a queen should be combined with queen right colonies.

- Feed as much heavy syrup in the feeder as they will take to enable them to insulate brood nest.
- Equalize colonies.
- Repair or replace equipment.
- Remove queen excluders to prevent starvation.
- Add entrance reducers to keep mice out.
- Begin planting of herbaceous perennials for pollen/nectar supplementation next season.

NOVEMBER

Bee activity is reduced as cold weather sets in. On warm days (45-50° or warmer), watch for bees foraging for pollen and making cleansing flights.

- Reduce entrance, allowing only two bees to enter.
- Talk to seasoned beekeepers about winter preparations.
- Store all equipment properly, using methods that prevent wax moth larvae.
- Perform Nosema assessment and treat, if necessary.
- Supplement with heavy syrup when the temperature allows (45-50° or above).
- Add weight on top of the hive to limit wind-induced toplessness.
- To improve heat insulation, close off screened bottoms.
- Plant trees for future pollen/nectar supplementation.

DECEMBER

Give both you and your bees a break. Don't open the hive – there is nothing that can be done now except hope you did everything right. Bees are in a tight cluster inside of the hive.

- Supplement with heavy syrup when the temperature allows (45-50° and above).
- Insulate hives with four or fewer frames of bees.
- Perform a year-end assessment and review of your apiary. Make plans/goals for next season.
- Clear snow and dead bees from the entrance area, when needed.
- Clean, repair, order and build equipment.
- Use downtime to increase your knowledge base – read, watch videos, take a class, etc.
- Order nucs for next year.