



The Managed Mentoring Program on getting started in beekeeping.

# Managed Mentoring



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## The Practice of a Walkaway Split

Lesson | Walkaway Splits



# What is Covered in this Module

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What is a walkaway split?

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Queen Quality

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Preparations

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Instructions

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Timing and Progression of the colonies

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Suitability of the Practice

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# Walkaway Splits – What is this?

## □ A Simple Split Method

- *A walk-away split is designed as a simple split method that is beneficial to new beekeepers*
- *It negates the need for the more intermediate skills of finding and moving a queen*
- *It employs simply splitting the hive stack into two hive stacks (assuming a 2-deep configuration) and letting the bees raise a queen in one of the halves*



# Raising a queen – the considerations

## □ The half that does not get the queen...

- *This half will promote a worker larva into a queen*
  - The bees will realize they are queenless and change the provisioning to one or more the larva and build an emergency queen
  - The queen that they raise will require mating – which means this operation has to take place in the season when drones are operational
    - Logically most beekeepers would do this first thing in the spring as a swarm control method, so this is generally not a problem
- *Queen Cells Present*
  - Sometimes you can get lucky and the colony has already started building queen cells and they get pressed into service to be the new queen



# Queen Quality – a consideration

## □ Queen Quality – a potential drawback to know

- *Some say queens are inferior with this method*
  - Unlike a swarm queen which is purposefully planned by the bees, the walkaway split forces the bees to build an emergency queen.
  - Given the unplanned nature, the bees are forced to pick a worker larva to promote to a queen
    - They provision the food differently and it changes the course of the bee development
  - This is not the same as building a true swarm cell which starts out its journey on day one with being fed to be a queen – it is not picked randomly
- *Some say this means the future queen may not be as well suited*



# Suitability

## □ Timing is everything

- *In a trade off for simplicity, you do have a little risk, but are well served to consider the timing*
- *One of the main reasons that a walkaway split is employed is to thwart swarming*
  - Swarm pressures come at the height of the season and that means that you are the optimal window to build queens. Great forage and resources means good nutrition and healthy queens
  - It is estimated that even emergency queens reared under these conditions can be just as good as planned swarm queens, and if not, they are still quite suitable



# Preparations

## □ While not complicated, preparation is needed

- *Setting up for success – ensuring the right distribution of resources*
  - Ideally you will do this with a colony that can have both boxes protect itself if split in half
- *To perform the split, both boxes need resources*
  - Since you are splitting the origin hive into two – you need to be sure that whichever does not have a queen has resources to build a queen – meaning a **distribution of worker cells of the right age** to make a queen
  - Additionally, they should have enough distribution of food resources to support both colonies until they become fully operational





# Resource Assessment: Hive Inspection

## □ Perform a hive inspection

- *Ensure the hive stack/colony is suitable for performing the split*
  - Inspect the hive and determine the resources.
  - If they are not flush with resources:
    - Give them resources from somewhere else, feed them, or wait until the bees make the hive interior flush with pollen and nectar throughout
- *Ensure there is brood in all stages in both boxes*
  - Look to ensure that the queen is laying eggs in both the top and bottom box
    - It is critical that the box that does not have a queen has source material to make a new queen. Sometimes you might rearrange frames to ensure this is the case.

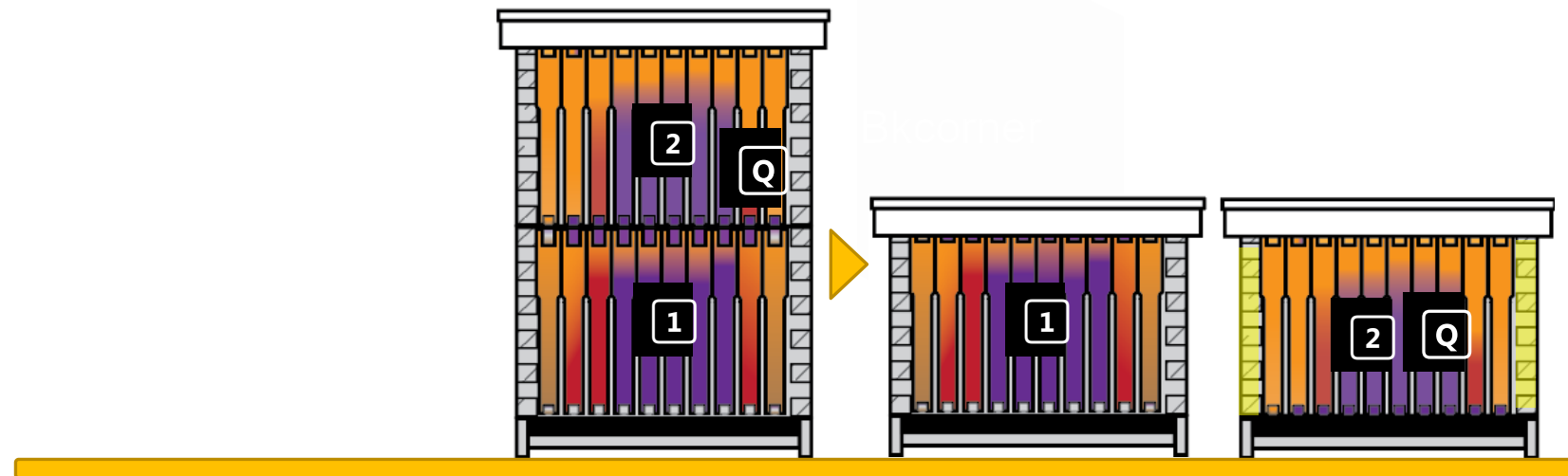


# Split: Walkaway Procedure

## □ Walkaway Split:

- *Place a new bottom board on a second hive stand.*
- *Move the top box to the new bottom board and supply it an inner cover+roof.*
  - One box will have a queen. The second, which has brood in all stages, will use **open brood** to make a new queen.

This is a good option with booming colonies where it is hard to find the queen



# What will happen

## □ The hive stack that does not have a queen

- *These bees will realize in short order that they do not have a queen*
  - They can tell by the lack of pheromone and inability to come into contact with the queen.
- *Once they realize they are queenless, they will make an emergency queen*
  - Nurse bees will pick larva of the right age and change what is fed to rear a queen.
  - The cells nominated by the nurse bees will be transformed from worker cells to emergency queen cells.



# 30 days to a working queen

## □ The Queen Lifecycle

- *It generally takes 16 days for a queen to emerge*
  - After 16 days the queen(s) will emerge.
  - Queen(s) will first be resident in the hive and if there are more than one, it is likely that the first few will go to encounter the others and eliminate them.
  - A few days after emergence – competition notwithstanding, a virgin queen will leave to get mated. Likely they will make a few nuptial flights.
  - Once mated the queen will return to the hive and begin laying eggs.
    - The first eggs might be misplaced, many to a cell, etc.
    - In time she will progress to normal laying patterns and the colony will carry on



# From Queen Cell to Operational

## □ What you might observe

- *The workforce will have to sustain itself while the queen progression occurs*
  - Foraging bees will be quite busy and it is likely that you might see the colony flush with resources
- *Nurse bees turn to colony chores*
  - Any brood in progress will run its course, and the nurse bees will care for it until conclusion. They then turn to chores inside the hive (wax work, etc.)



# What of the colony that got the queen?

## □ This colony will rebuild

- *The queen will lay and the workforce will be replenished.*
- *The existing bees will carry on normal functions and they will rebound quickly – especially in the early forage season*
  - Keep tabs of this colony – they could grow at such a rapid rate that they could theoretically get to swarm strength once again in a good season

## □ Feed if needed, and add boxes as they require

- *Proactively keep track and provide them what they need*



## ▲ A little secret...

- **Walkaway Splits are not just for beginners**
  - *Some like the low fuss concept of this so much that they do it, even if they are seasoned beekeepers*
  - *You could perform a walkaway split – and go another way*
    - Perform the split. Then come back and look for brood in production (this hive stack got the queen).
    - Go to the other hive stack and supply it a queen to give them a jump start
      - With a new queen the bees would tear down any emergency cells – or you can go through the frames and do this yourself once your supplied queen is functional



# A Versatile Practice

## □ Perceptions and Opportunity

- *It is a point to recognize that there are perceptions in the bee community that this is a poor practice*
  - If you had to say why, it is likely the 'emergency queen' dynamic behind this
- *Others keep it in their back pocket as a tool to use in their management plan*
  - If you intended to make proper splits but ran out of time, perhaps you simply do a walkaway as an alternative.
  - It might just be the plan that saves you from the bees swarming away





# Closing Comments

## ■ Customary Close

- Where we stand, where we are going...
  - *This module closes out some of the philosophical baseline topics*
  - *Our next topic moves to the preparatory steps for getting started:*
    - Introduction to hive equipment
    - Recommendations of hive equipment for purchase
    - Sourcing Protective Gear
    - Additional Equipment for the operation of the apiary
    - And Introduction to Bees for purchase



- **What Questions did we not anticipate?**
  - If you have feedback, you can leave a constructive comment; but be nice.
  - You could also send an email to [comments@managedmentoring.com](mailto:comments@managedmentoring.com)
    - *Please refer to this video in the subject so we know what the reference is.*

