

A BEEKEEPER'S YEAR IN A VIRGINIA APIARY

- January:** Long, cold nights are ideal for talking and reading about your bees. Start the New Year off by attending a beekeeper meeting in your area. Read beekeeping books and magazines. Review successes and failures of past year. Make plans for any needed changes in management and schedule. Assemble and repair beekeeping equipment. Hope for a January thaw so the bees have a cleansing flight. Monitor weights and amount of honey in hives.
- February:** Maples, willows, and other early season plants are in bloom. Make a brief check of wintering colonies for honey and brood (laying queen). Reposition frames with honey and pollen placing them near the brood cluster. First pollen should become available. If low on pollen add a pollen supplement or substitute. Feed bees 1:1 sugar/water syrup on warmer days to minimize winter mortality. If low on honey stores feed 2:1 sugar/water syrup. In late February stimulate brood production by feeding 1:2 sugar/water syrup.
- March:** Dandelion is in bloom. Check colonies on a warm, sunny day. Check for old and rotting wood, frames in disrepair or with old comb, food reserves, and brood pattern and size. If food reserves are short feed 1:1 sugar/water syrup. Colonies that need feeding should be monitored and fed continually as needed. Clean bottom boards. Mid to late March replace solid bottom board with screen bottom board or remove cover from screen. Reverse hive boxes to position brood in lower box. Treat soil for small hive beetle (SHB) where infestations are found.
- April:** Fruit trees, redbud, and mustards are in bloom. Examine the colony as the weather permits. Continue to monitor food reserves and brood development. Check for brood diseases and monitor mite levels. Replace queens two or more years of age. Begin dusting with terramycin if American foulbrood (AFB) or European foulbrood (EFB) is present. Repeat reversal for hive boxes of strong colonies and begin checking for queen cells. Install package bees and feed light syrup. Make splits with brood and honey frames from multiple hives to increase hive numbers. Attend Virginia State Beekeepers Association Spring Meeting.
- May:** Clover, tulip poplar, and locust trees are in bloom. Make final reversal of brood chambers or implement swarm prevention as needed. Inspect brood pattern for disease and parasites. Add first super and check if additional supers are needed in mid to late month. Remove any antibiotics or pesticides from colonies about to produce surplus honey. Continue feeding and manipulate package bee colonies to aid in comb construction. Add a second brood chamber to package colonies.
- June:** Basswood, sourwood, and sumac are in bloom. Add supers to colonies as needed. Continue looking for queen cells until nectar flow slackens. Minimize disturbance of hives during honey flows. Requeen any captured swarms.
- July:** Thistle, knapweed, and blueweed are in bloom. Add supers as needed. Harvest and extract honey when nectar flow slows. Colonies should be left with at least 1 full

super of honey at harvest time. Attend Eastern Apiculture Society or Heartland Apicultural Society Meeting.

- August:** Alfalfa, buckwheat, and goldenrod are in bloom. Check mite levels in apiary(s). Begin Varroa mite treatment as needed once supers are removed. Order or begin raising queens for Fall replacement. Inspect colonies for honey and pollen reserves, queen condition, brood production, worker population, and disease occurrence. Feed if low on food stores. Protect empty supers in storage and on weak hives against wax moth. Paradichlorobenzene (PDB) or other approved method of control may be used on stored supers. Freezing frames and woodenware will control both waxmoth and SHB. Show off your bees, honey, and hive products at the county fair.
- September:** Asters and ironweed are in bloom. Remove all excess supers. Unite weak hives. Requeen hives with queens older than two years of age. Extract supers or frames of honey or store for spring feeding. Honey in extracted and partially filled supers can be fed back to bees by placing them above the inner cover. Do not let bees rob from neighboring hives. Feed syrup or pollen supplement if needed. Continue wax moth control for stored equipment. Enter honey and other hive products in State Fair.
- October:** First frosts can occur towards the end of the month. Combine any remaining weak and queenless hives. Place reducer in hive entrance. Place spacer under inner cover and offset brood chamber boxes to provide ventilation and reduce moisture buildup in Winter. Medicate as needed for Nosema after supers are removed. Remove Varroa mite control if colonies were treated. Feed heavy syrup if hive has less than 60 pounds of honey (two full supers or one deep box). Sell honey at craft fairs, fall festivals, etc.
- November:** One final inspection. Brood area should be in lower box(s) and small in size. Workers will begin clustering around queen and brood on colder nights. Cover screen bottom board or replace with solid bottom board. Order replacement queens, nucs, and package bees for next year. Attend Virginia State Beekeepers Association Fall Meeting.
- December:** Sell honey and candles at Holiday shows, prepare as holiday gifts, etc. Begin planning for next year. Look for new apiary sites. Renew old pollination contracts and look for new ones. Leave the bees alone!! Take inventory of supplies and order equipment. Make sure the family knows your bee needs for Christmas.