

Autumn Pack Down Procedure Notes - Jim Samson of Black Hill Apiaries

A guiding principle is to try to accommodate the bees comfortably within a volume approximate to their numbers. At the end of a good summer season the colonies are usually in three or four box hives. I like to approach the “pack-down” in two stages a few weeks apart depending on what nectar is still coming in.

STAGE ONE: reduce down to 2 boxes by simply taking off the honey harvest. Look for good sealed honey frames but always be mindful of the fact that you will need to leave 4 or 5 good frames of honey on the hive for Winter. This is where your skill in assessing prevailing conditions comes into play: if conditions are good (stores still coming in and a bit of blossom still about) you can take more, if things are closing up leave more for the bees.

STAGE TWO: Perhaps a month or so later, weather colder, days shorter, time to really prepare the hive for Winter.

Do I leave the hive as a double or do I reduce to a single? Opinions vary on this. The strength of the hive is an important consideration but it also depends on how much time you have. Reducing to a single takes time, skill and care but in my opinion is better bee-keeping. Why? My belief is that the tighter bees are packed in, the better they can control their environment over Winter. The more empty spaces in the hive, the greater the opportunity for condensation and mildew to occur. Also, Wintering in doubles, although it is quicker and easier, tends to waste good honey since part of the potential harvest is left in cold parts of the hive, goes crystalline and may remain unused. If you decide to Winter in singles, you must be a more assiduous beekeeper and **monitor regularly** to ensure the bees have enough food.

PROCEDURE FOR REDUCING TO A SINGLE BOX HIVE.

1. Remove top box and set aside on a stand, lid stays on for the moment.
2. From bottom box remove any “lazy frames”, ie those that are completely empty. Usually these are on the outside since bees naturally build their colony up in the middle.
3. Select the best 5 frames of sealed honey from the 2 boxes.
4. Select the best frame of stored pollen.
5. You now have 5 frames of honey and 1 frame of pollen. Now select the 2 best frames of brood making sure the queen is on one.
6. Arrange the bottom box with the 2 brood frames in the centre, then pollen with the honey on the outsides.
7. Replace the lid and take away all other material for safe storage.

This is the time to assess material. Throw out any frames with very dark or mis-shaped combs (melt down wax and burn old frames). Store any good frames so that wax moth does not spoil. Suggest freezing for about 48 ours then store in boxes or plastic bags away from rats.