SUMMER MANAGEMENT

The main concerns during the summer are swarm prevention, supering for honey production, and removing the honey crop. Swarm prevention and control and removing the honey crop are covered in separate chapters.

Supering for the crop

It is necessary to insure that sufficient storage space is available for the honey crop. Colonies should be equipped with at least one super ahead of their needs. This is necessary since the bees require space for the incoming nectar which will be ripened into honey. Inadequate space causes the bees to store the honey in the brood chambers. This limits the space for brood rearing and is referred to as being honey bound. A good indicator as to when to super (add another hive body) is the presence of white, freshly secreted wax along the lower edge of the top bars of the frames. Supers containing foundation should be added below partially filled supers and just above the brood chamber(s). The bees will more readily draw out the comb in this position. A queen excluder should not be used beneath a super containing foundation. Frames within this super may be rotated from the center to the outside as they become drawn out. Bear in mind that a good nectar flow should be in progress before any supers of foundation are added.

Shallow supers are recommended for extracted honey. They are lighter in weight than deep supers and place less strain on the back when lifting them. A shallow super holds 30 pounds of honey as compared with 50 pounds for a deep super. Most beekeepers use only eight or nine frames in their supers. The frames are separated by a spacer. The reason for this is that the bees will build the comb thicker, making uncapping easier. Ten frames must be used in the super if starting foundation in the frames. Otherwise, the bees will build combs between the frames.

Queen Excluders

A queen excluder is either a sheet of perforated metal or a wire grid housed in a metal or wood frame that is placed between the brood chamber(s) and honey supers. It prevents the queen, but not the worker bees, from moving up in the hive into the surplus honey supers. Thus, it prevents the undesirable presence of eggs and brood in the honey supers. The use of a queen excluder is often considered an impediment to the bees during a honey flow. It seems that sometimes the bees are reluctant to go through it. If used, it should be removed at the time of the honey harvest.

Honey Harvest

The nectar that bees collect is generally half to three-quarters water. After nectar is carried into the hive, the bees evaporate most of the water from it. While evaporating the water, enzymes change the nectar into honey. Then the bees seal the honey into cells of the honeycomb. The honey crop may be removed when at least three-quarters of the cells in a super are capped. Honey with more than 19% moisture ferments easily.

It is recommended that you harvest your honey by August or September in Worcester County. The advantages of summer removal of honey are: the good weather usually prevalent; the reduction in possibility of robbing when removing the honey; the advantage of leaving the fall crop for the bees as winter stores. In addition, fewer honey supers will be required since they can be returned to the hives as needed after extraction has taken place. Ensure that the honey you are harvesting has been capped by the bees. When removing the honey keep in mind that you are removing only the surplus. The colony will need 60-80 pounds for over-wintering.