

NCBA  
BEE SCHOOL  
2026

Spring Management

With

Brian McCafferty





# Definitions

- **Our Honeybees – *Apis mellifera* (Western honeybee or European honeybee) is a single individual bee that is part of a larger social community.**
- **Colony – the family of bees. They are a social unit and uniquely exhibit social behaviors. Think of the colony as a superorganism (the colony itself functions like a single organism) with each bee within the colony likened to a cell within an animal, although individual bees have unique traits & personalities.**
- **Beehive – the housing in which the colony of bees live.**



# Goal Oriented Beekeeping

- **Beekeepers who work towards a goal will typically have the best success**
- **First Year Beekeeper Goals – Keep My Bees ALIVE!**
  - **Learn new skills, meet with your mentor, get a state inspection**
  - **Master mite counting and control – test often, treat when needed**
  - **Provide good nutrition to ensure healthy bees**
  - **Prepare the bees for the winter**



# What is Your Goal

- **Just Help the Bees?**
- **Honey production?**
- **Pollination?**
- **Bee production?**
- **Backyard enjoyment?**



# Regardless of Your Goal

- You need to keep inspection notes and records – find a system that works
- You need to get your bees to build out all the frames and fill most of the brood frames with nectar to get ready for winter.
- Your job is to keep the bees fed, healthy and the colony growing.
- New colonies typically need to be fed for the first several weeks.
- While new colonies from packages typically start with low mite counts you still need to check regularly.
- You should be inspecting your colonies every 7 to 10 days.
- Mite counts should be done at least every 4 weeks.



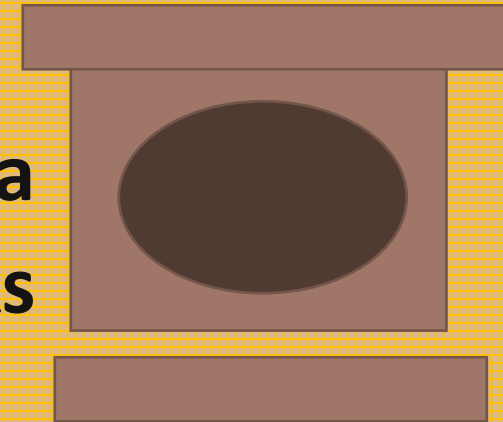
# Forget the Calendar – Watch Nature

- **Years ago, there was a beekeeping calendar – forget about it.**
- **Watch the 10-day forecast**
- **Walk the neighborhood and look for forage and your bees.**
- **Load up Google Maps – what is in the surrounding 3-5 miles?**
- **Check out open areas**
- **What is blooming?**
- **Maybe the calendar is out, but what is blooming now matters.**
- **Has there been or will there be heavy rainfall?**



## Let's Start with the Beginning

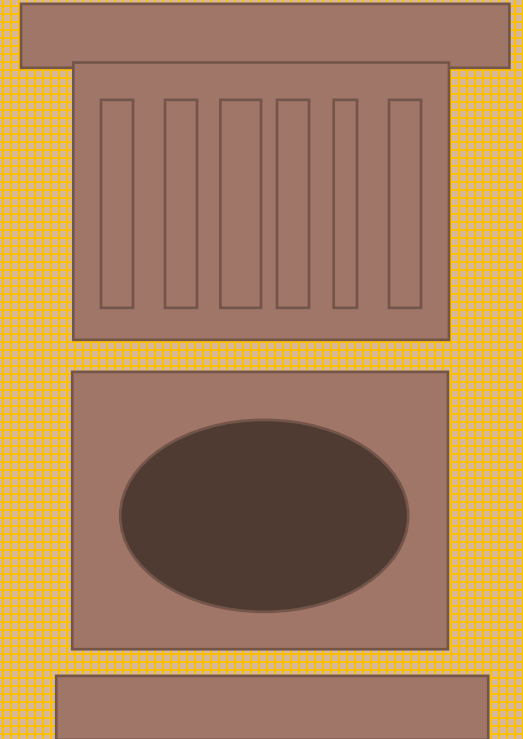
- **Packages:** It takes about 4 to 6 weeks for there to be enough bees to build out the first brood chamber.
- **NUC's** are much faster, often requiring a second brood chamber by 2 to 3 weeks since they started with 5 frames.
- The buildout is not always in the center – mine favor the sunny side of the hive.





# When Do We Add the Second Box?

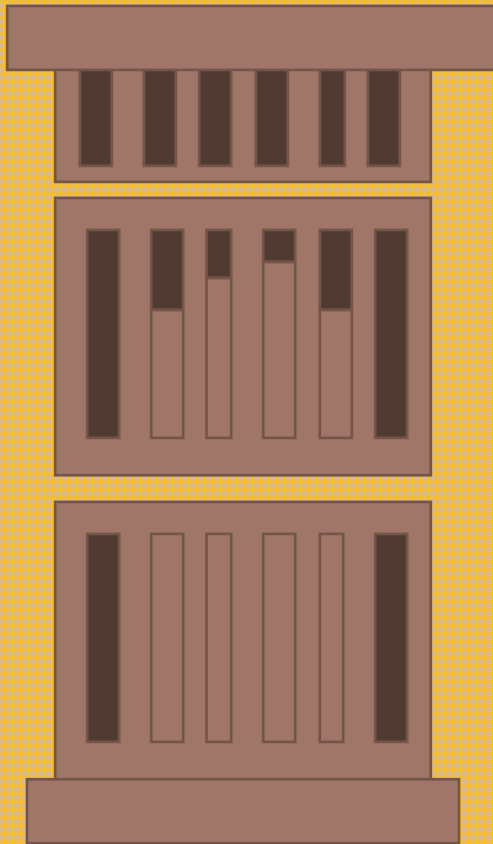
- **Add the second brood box when the bees have built out 8 to 10 frames. Keep notes – if you are doing weekly inspections your bees may be building faster. If you add the second box too soon you can move frames later. Keep ahead of the bees, especially if you will be away.**
- **Continue feeding if needed. Watch the entrance, are the bees bringing in pollen? Are the bees capping nectar/honey? How are the food stores?**





# What to Expect in the Hive

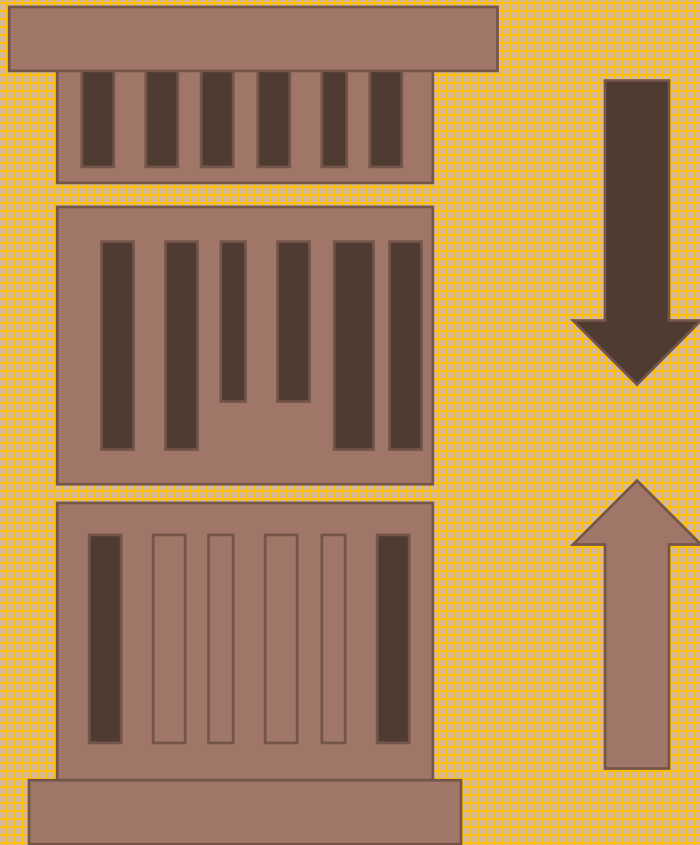
## The Honey Dome



- **Honey is stored over and around the brood forming a dome over the brood**

# What to Expect in the Hive

## The Elevator Effect

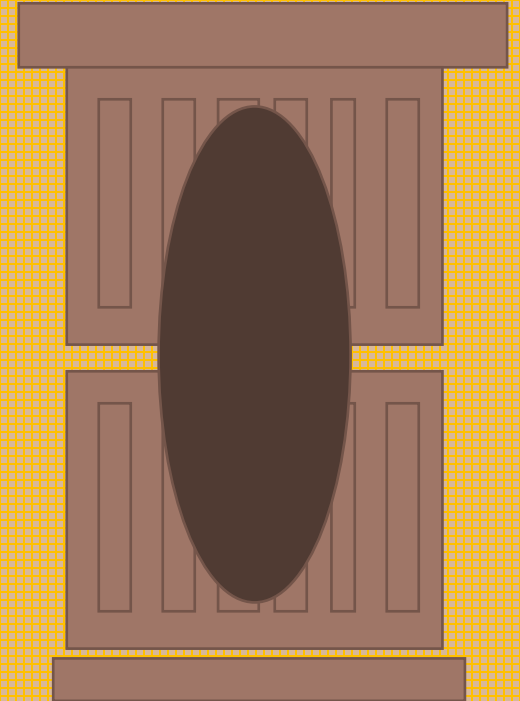


- **Workers store honey from the top moving downward**
- **The queen lays brood from the bottom moving upward**



# The Chimney Effect

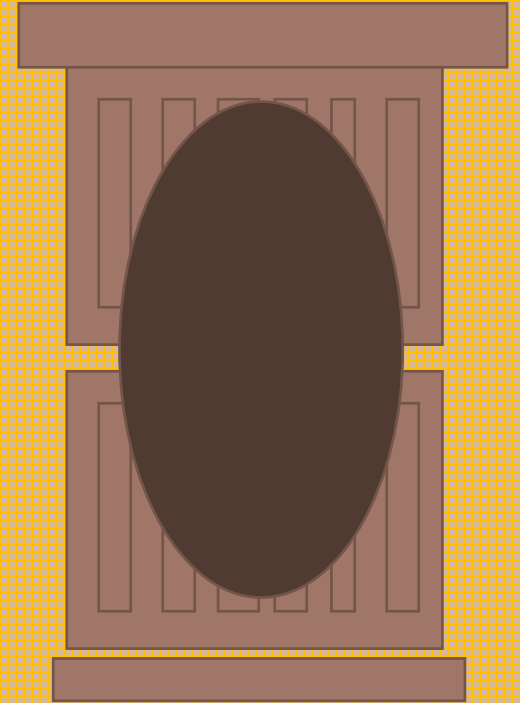
- **The Chimney Effect occurs when you expand too soon and the bees ignore the outside frames. If this happens you can swap built out frames without brood with the outside frames.**
- **Don't break the brood nest.**
- **Remember that queen behavior is to move upwards!**





# When Do I stop Feeding?

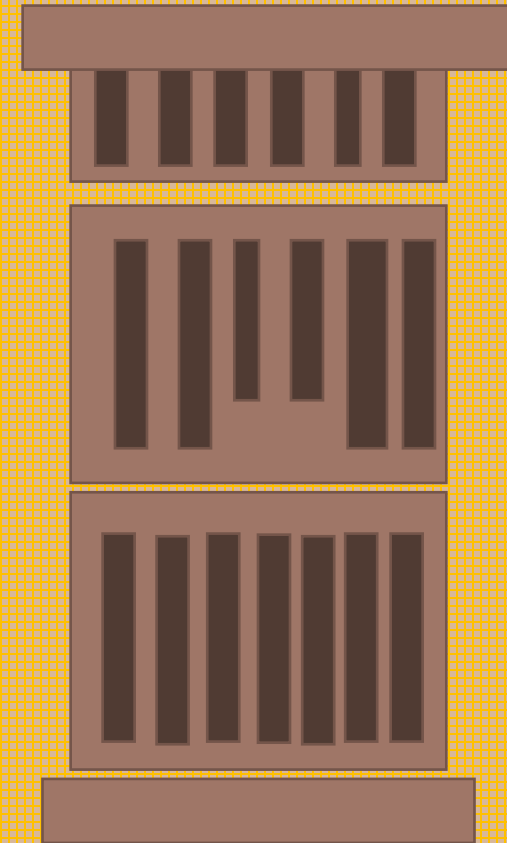
- **Stop when there is 3 or 4 frames of foundation left, leaving the queen room to lay.**
- **This is a good time to add supers**





# Adding Supers

- If you have filled 2-brood chambers and there is still a nectar flow you should add supers.
- Even if you do not get honey the bees can start building out the foundation.





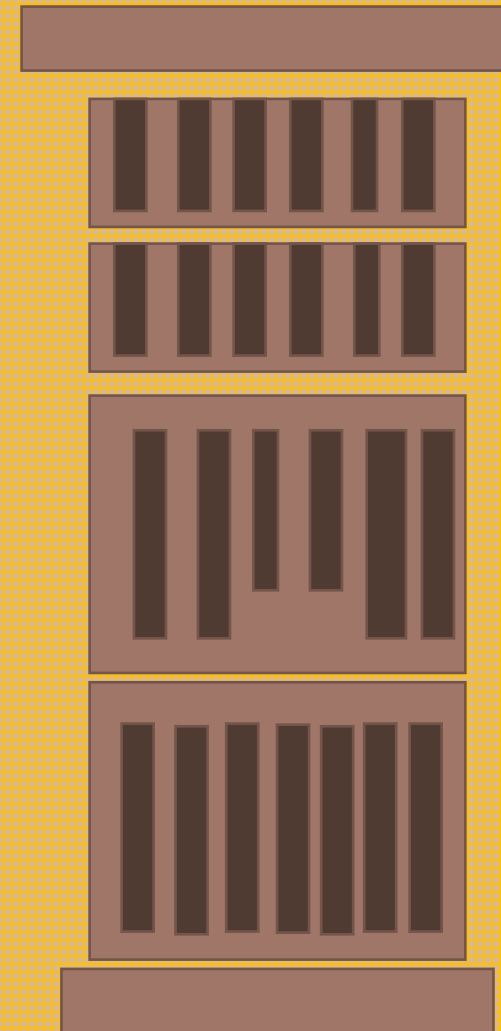
# This Colony is Ready for a Honey Super





# Adding More Supers

- If your bees have built out the first super add another one.
- Some beehives grow very tall with 4 or more supers
- Make sure the beehive isn't leaning and is on stable ground with a strong stand.
- Make sure your stands are not too high – full supers can weigh 70 lbs each.





# To Exclude or Not to Exclude

- **That is the question. Whether it is nobler to suffer the queen laying in the supers or risk not getting supers built out.**
- **Some people claim a honey excluder will keep the bees from building out the super. I have not found that to be true (with my bees)**
- **To get around this (if you really have a problem) you can leave the super off until they start building out the frames but install it before the frames are built out enough for brood. This is very time critical.**



# Final Thoughts and Notes

- **Keep Records – Take inspection notes – ALWAYS!**
- **Test for Mites – at least every 4 weeks once the first brood box is built out.**
- **Treat for mites if counts indicate.**
- **Read the Label – Many treatments are temperature sensitive.**
- **Go to hands-on demonstrations**
- **Ask for a visit from your mentor**
- **Register your apiary <https://www.mass.gov/forms/apiary-and-colony-registration-form>**
- **Get a State Inspection <https://www.mass.gov/forms/mdar-apiary-inspection-request-form>**