



Tips for Beginners: Installing Package Bees

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What is a “Bee Package?”

- A container with screened sides that holds and allows transportation of a bee colony
- 2 to 4 pounds of worker bees
 - About 10,000 worker bees in a 3-lb package
- Queen separated from workers in queen cage
 - Workers and queen are generally not related
- Can of sugar syrup as food supply during transport



A stack of 25 bee packages

Overview of Steps

- Order Bee Package (generally timed to arrive in early spring)
- Set Up Empty Hive
- Pick Up Package
- Install Bees
 - Open Package
 - Remove Feeding Can
 - Remove and Prep Queen Cage
 - “Shaking” vs “Non-Shaking” Installation
- Follow-up Tasks
 - Removal of package container and replacement of frames (“non-shake” method)
 - Feeding
 - Checking for release of queen, removal of empty queen cage
 - Checking for successful brood production (eggs and larvae)



Set Up Hive Before Your Package(s) Arrive

- Set up Hive Box
 - Bottom board
 - Hive body with frames (1 deep body *or* 2 medium bodies recommended)
 - Inner cover
 - Empty hive body (optional if using a top feeder)
 - Top Cover
 - Entrance reducer



A basic hive setup ready for installation. This setup has 2 medium hive bodies, but a single deep hive body could be used instead. The hive bodies in the background will be used to cover an internal top feeder after installation.

Installation Equipment/Supplies

- Personal Protection (Veil, Jacket, Gloves)
- Hive Tool(s)
- Flat Object to Cover Package Opening
- Rubber Bands, Staple Gun, Thumbtacks
- Drywall Screw or Nail
- Small Marshmallows
- Sprayer with light sugar syrup
 - 1:1 or 2:1 water to sugar mix
- Syrup Feeder with 1:1 sugar mix



Picking Up Your Package Bees!

- Check that bees in package seem healthy
 - Clustered around queen cage
 - Some dead workers normal. If there is a thick layer of dead bees, get a different package
- Ensure that mesh on package is intact
 - Normal to have some bees clinging to outside of cage
- Keep moderately cool for travel home
 - Keep out of wind/Avoid overheating
- Install package as soon as feasible after pickup
 - Can maintain for a few days if weather does not cooperate
 - Cool, dark place with ventilation
 - Maybe occasional spraying with light syrup through mesh



A healthy-looking package of bees. Note cluster of workers surrounding queen cage and can of syrup. There are few dead bees on floor of the package.

Prepare for Installation

- Remove 5 Frames from hive body
- Spray remaining frames with sugar water (optional)
- Pry off package cover (if there is one)
- Remove feeder can; cover package opening
- Hold onto queen cage tab and slide out of opening
- Cover package opening with something flat
- Examine queen in cage (may need to brush away workers)
- Remove cork from one end of queen cage and replace with marshmallow
 - Be sure queen stays in the queen cage! Use finger tip to plug opening until marshmallow can be inserted



Prying feeder can from package.



Queen inside queen cage.

Put queen cage into hive

- Attach queen cage to a frame
 - Rubber bands around frame
 - Press into drawn comb and wedge between frames
 - Staple cage tab onto top bar of frame
- About 1 inch down from top of foundation
- Off-center toward front or back of hive
 - You don't want it directly under hole in top cover
- Aim candy plug end toward middle of hive
- Screen on cage facing up or down (not blocked against foundation)
- Frame with cage goes near middle of hive



Queen cages attached to frames with rubber bands.

Method 1: “Shaking” Bees into Hive

- Give package a solid thump on ground to knock bees to bottom
- Remove package cover
- Turn package upside down with hole over frames and pour some bees over queen cage
- Gently shake package back and forth while pouring more bees into area of hive body where frames were removed
- When most of the bees are in the hive, gently lower removed frames back into hive body
 - Don't force down! There could be a pile of bees under there!
- Put inner cover into place
- Place feeders, empty hive body, and top cover as appropriate
- Place mostly empty package next to hive entrance so remaining bees can crawl/fly into hive



Method 2: “Non-Shake” Introduction

- Place entire package into area of hive body where frames were removed
 - Opening facing up
- Remove cover from package
- Put inner cover in place
- Place feeders, empty hive body, and top cover as appropriate
- If using medium bodies, will need to remove frames from both hive bodies for package to fit
- You MUST reopen hive, remove package box, and replace missing frames, within 24-48 hours!
 - Be prepared to slice away excess comb
 - Make sure queen has not moved into package box



Bee package placed into deep hive body for “non-shake” installation. Five frames have been removed to make room for package.

Feeding

- Installed packages generally require feeding for at least one week (or until nectar sources are available)
- Plan on about 1 pint of 1:1 sugar syrup per day
- Various Feeding Options:
 - Boardman feeder at entrance
 - Top feeders on inner cover (can surround with empty hive body to protect from cold)
- Might also want to provide pollen patties (protein source)



Top-feeder bucket placed over opening of inner cover and then covered with medium hive bodies.

Follow-up Activities

- “Non-Shake” Method – remove package in 24-48 hours, replace with frames
- 5-7 days after installation, check to make sure queen was released from cage
 - If so, remove queen cage
 - If not, may need to ease out marshmallow plug while holding opening inside hive. If queen seems healthy and there is a cluster of attending bees, you could carefully “drill” a small nail hole through the marshmallow plug and return the queen cage for a few more days.
- 10 days after installation check for evidence that queen is laying
 - If you find eggs/larvae... you can close the hive back up
 - You don’t have to FIND the queen
 - If no eggs or larvae, the queen may be a dud (not mated properly), injured, or dead.
 - May need a replacement queen.
- May want to use your smoker for later checks...



Potential Issues and Considerations

- Dead queen – Get a replacement ASAP
- Cold/wet weather
 - Delay installation?
 - Set up tarp over installation area?
 - Could favor “non-shake” installation method
 - Be quick!
- Crawling bees – tuck in pant legs!
- Absconding colonies
 - Do not use smoker during installation
 - Be as gentle as possible
 - Avoid over-checking right after installation



Questions? Suggestions?

