

I keep all my colonies on double brood throughout the year with 7 frames and two wide dummy boards in each brood box. My spring clean involves lifting the hive to one side and placing a clean floor and brood box in its place. I generally find that the bees are occupying the top brood box so I carefully transfer each frame to the clean box on the floor. The top of the frames are cleaned of excess wax as they are transferred over. They are also given clean wide dummy boards. Any frames that are old or badly drawn out get removed. The bottom brood box should have 7 good frames containing food, brood and two wide dummies which are the equivalent of two frames.

A clean top brood box is placed over the bottom one and given another two clean wide dummy boards. Only transfer frames that are good and may have brood in them but I make up the 7 frames by adding foundation either side of the brood if there is brood there. When a lot of foundation has been used cover the frames with a cover board with a central porter hole. That way an English syrup feeder is placed over the hole and filled with a reasonable quantity of syrup. I prefer the manufactured syrup rather than making my own. The bees use this syrup to help draw out the foundation and you will be amazed how quickly they can do this. Before long and at the next inspection you should find lots of eggs in this newly drawn-out comb.

Any foundation is always placed in the top brood box. The heat rises from the brood below and the bees draw out the comb into all corners.

Replace the crown board and feeder with a Queen excluder and super of drawn comb. If you don't have any drawn comb for the super and have to use foundation, then leave the Queen excluder off. This encourages the bees to go up and start drawing the foundation. Once they have started drawing it out then make sure the Queen has gone down into the brood boxes and place a Queen excluder under the super.

There are a lot of options with this method. If the colony is not very strong then only use 5 or 6 frames in each brood box. As the colony builds up take a frame from the top box and place it in bottom box. Replace with two frames of foundation or empty drawn comb placed either side of the brood. That way you keep the same number of frames in each box.

This also helps delay swarming. It doesn't prevent swarming but by giving the bees clean comb you are helping fight disease.

On a further note, when over wintering the colony the benefit of double brood is chimneying the colony making it easier for them to get access to food and especially if a block of fondant is placed directly on top of the frames. I have found that this help to prevent isolation starvation.

*Enid Brown, May 2024*