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## **Upcoming Courses**

## **WHEN HONEY BEES SWARM**

### **Is there anything you can (or should) do?**

What's the difference between a honey bee swarm and a honey bee colony? A colony is an established hive, complete with combs and nectar and young bees that are being cared for. A swarm is simply a mass of bees (and their queen) that is looking for a place to become a colony. Swarming is the way an established bee colony reproduces. Honey bees swarm in spring and early summer, with the earliest swarms being the largest. The swarms are most often a result of rapid colony growth in the spring due to abundant pollen and nectar sources. Sometimes a swarm occurs as a result of adverse conditions or starvation in a colony. As the hive conditions change, the colony produces a new queen and male bees. The old queen then leaves with about half the worker bees to look for a new nest site, leaving the young queen to repopulate the parent colony.

When in flight, a swarm looks like a bee tornado as the bees fly in a large mass. The swarm occasionally stops to rest in a tree, or on virtually any other object. They crowd their bodies together in what is, more or less, an elongated ball or pear-shaped cluster. The presence of a newly formed swarm may be an indication that there is a parent colony nearby.

Because there is no hive to defend, honey bee swarms are generally more docile than a colony and are not disturbed by nearby activity. Beekeepers can often simply shake them into a box, but we still don't



- If the swarm is to be removed, contact your local beekeeper's association.
- In the rare case where a swarm is located in a building wall or ceiling void, the removal is a little bit more complicated and may involve cutting into walls. You should still consult with a local beekeeper for advice before you attempt this kind of job.
- You should not try to kill or remove the swarm yourself unless you are trained to do so and have special protective gear. Permission must be obtained from the Department of Agriculture before treating the nest with any insecticide. Please remember that there are no registered agricultural remedies for bees. Let's protect our environment as we need the bees to pollinate our crops and gardens.

**New Report Addresses the  
decline in Honey Bee Health**

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recommend that you try it. When a swarm cluster is not bothering anyone, the best thing is to just leave it alone. Most swarms will fly on within a few hours, or at most, within a few days. During that time, scout bees are out looking for a location for the new colony.

Swarm cluster removal might be necessary if it is located where children or pets or someone with a sting allergy could come in direct contact with the bees, or if the presence of a swarm impacts public safety. A cluster on a child's slide, on the front door of a home, on an airplane's wing, or hanging on a traffic signal might call for removal. Because there is always a chance that a scout bee will discover a good nest site nearby, it is sometimes smart to have any swarm cluster on or near a house removed.

**HOW TO DEAL WITH A HONEY BEE SWARM**

- Do nothing with a honey bee swarm if you don't have to. Usually, the problem will take care of itself soon enough. Advise your customer to keep children and pets away.

Honey bee colony collapse disorder (CCD) has been a topic of concern for years as experts try to determine the cause for the serious drop in the number of honey bees. EPA and the United States Department of Agriculture just released a comprehensive report that determined that there are actually multiple factors involved in colony decline.

The report implicates a combination of poor nutrition, the parasitic Varroa mite and various new viruses that attack honey bees, along with a lack of genetic diversity among colonies that would confer resistance to parasites and disease. Some earlier studies had indicated that the use of pesticides, especially neonicotinoids, on crops pollinated by honey bees was the cause of CCD. The new report states that it is still not clear whether or not pesticide exposure is a major factor. More research is needed on pesticide impact, including the actual levels of exposure to pesticides that bees receive. View the full report at:

[usda.gov/documents/  
ReportHoneyBeeHealth.pdf](http://usda.gov/documents/ReportHoneyBeeHealth.pdf)

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