

Best Management Practices for Maintaining European Honey Bee Colonies in Virginia

The recommended practices for maintaining honey bees in managed colonies include:

1. Comply with all homeowner association, local, state and federal ordinances, laws, and regulations as they pertain to beekeeping and management of honey bees.
2. Maintain strong, healthy, populous colonies.
 - a. Remove or securely seal all empty equipment.
 - b. Remove or combine all weak colonies.
 - c. Treat or remove all disease or pest infested colonies.
 - d. Report contagious disease or pest infested colonies to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Office of Plant Industry Services (Department).
3. Implement proper management and control techniques to prevent abundance of virgin queens and occurrence of swarms.
4. Maintain colonies with honey bees of European origin (EHB).
 - a. Purchase or obtain queens, packaged bees, nucleus colonies, and established hives from known EHB-only regions or certified EHB suppliers.
 - b. Divisions or splits should be provided with EHB queens.
 - c. Replace all swarm queens caught or trapped within 30 days.
 - d. Replace queens in all colonies every two years.
 - e. Mark or clip queens prior to introduction to splits, swarms, or colonies.
 - f. Replace all unmarked or unclipped queens within 21 days.
5. When maintaining more than 5 colonies in an apiary a minimum of 10% of all colonies shall contain at least one standard frame, or the equivalent, of drone comb.
6. Maintain all apiaries at least 10 feet away from property lines, and ensure all colonies less than 40 feet from property lines are placed behind a barrier which would prevent direct access or flight pathways to the colonies.
7. Ensure that colony flyways are more than 12 feet above the ground when they cross property lines.
8. When maintaining colonies within 200 feet of a property line provide and maintain a water source within 50 feet or one half the distance to the nearest unnatural water source, which ever is closest.

9. Remove or relocate an apiary that is within 50 feet of any animal that is tethered, penned, kenneled, or otherwise prevented from escaping a stinging incident.
10. Avoid opening or disturbing colonies if neighbors or the general public are participating in outside activities or using machinery within 75 feet of the apiary.
11. Replace queens in colonies exhibiting excessive defensive behavior which may be harmful to the general public, livestock, or domestic animals.
12. Report all colonies suspected of being of non-EHB origin to the Department.
 - a. If requested, collect samples of worker bees from the brood area of suspected non-EHB colonies and submit samples to the Department for analysis.
 - b. Within 7 days of notification, replace queens, destroy all drone brood, and place queen excluder over entrances in colonies found to be of non-EHB origin (95% certainty) as determined by the Department.
 - c. If requeening efforts are unsuccessful or not practical, depopulate all colonies determined to be a pure or hybrid race other than EHB (95% certainty).
13. In the event that a locality is declared an Africanized Honey Bee (AHB) suspected or established area:
 - a. Annually replace queens in all colonies with queens produced from areas known to contain only EHB populations, or
 - b. Ensure that queens originating from AHB established or suspect areas are from certified EHB stock.
 - c. Request, keep, and produce upon request a copy of the EHB certification from the supplier of all queens purchased or obtained from areas determined to contain or suspected of having AHB populations.
 - d. Encourage the destruction of all swarms caught or trapped in counties and other localities with established or suspected AHB suspect populations.
 - e. Immediately replace the queens of any swarms caught or trapped with certified EHB queens.
 - f. Maintain at least one bait trap in the vicinity of each apiary.
14. Ensure that all queens purchased or obtained from areas determined to contain or suspected of having AHB populations are accompanied by EHB certification.

For further information contact:

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