

SWARMS

Swarms are how bees procreate, so a swarm of bees has no home. There is little need to remove a swarm which 8' or more above ground because unless the swarm is disturbed, the bees will ignore people. A swarm has a queen which has vacated the nest along with most of the foraging bees and has clustered on a branch, bench, against a wall, etc. A swarm can leave within hours of landing, or up to four days later.

When a colony is strong enough to expand, several new queens are raised. At about the same time, the queen is put on a diet to slim down so she can fly more easily. Around the time the new queens are ready to hatch, the original queen leaves in a swarm. The queen is unable to fly very far, so she will settle somewhere within a few hundred yards of the nest.

The swarming bees will gather around her and settle down until the scouts can locate a suitable nesting site. Bees prefer to nest in cavities with restricted entrances because they are easier to defend against predators. Swarms do not nest in the area they landed, the preferred location will be a mile or more away (nature's way of discouraging inbreeding).

The swarm places a high priority on building a nest as quickly as possible because by the time the first egg in a new nest hatches, many of the bees which swarmed to form the nest are dead. Within 3 weeks of occupying a nesting location, the swarming bees will have drawn several combs of wax extruded from their bodies, and laid in a small supply of honey and pollen so that the emerging bees will have sufficient food until they become foragers.

If the homeowner is fortunate enough to see a swarm arrive to take up residence in the house, there are a few steps that can be taken to encourage the bees to depart. The key thing is to start *IMMEDIATELY*, because the longer bees are resident, the more difficult it is to make them depart.

Self Help: One of the most unnerving situations arises when a swarm lands in the driveway. It is usually discovered when a homeowner wants to use the car, and is taken aback at the idea of having to walk through bees to reach the driver's door. No matter how quickly a removalist can be contacted, there is still the delay for one to arrive but most homeowners do not know what to do.

Capturing a swarm without getting close to the bees is possible, and it can be done with a large (at least 1500cuin) cardboard box, a knife, and some tape.

<p><u>The Easy Way</u></p> <p>The opening on the left has the flap bent up and held in position with tape.</p> <p>The flap can be closed by cutting or tearing the tape away. The bees at the entrance will be pushed into the box by the flap closing over them.</p>		<p><u>The Hard Way</u></p> <p>The opening on the right has been cut so that the flap has to be doubled under the box.</p> <p>This raises the height, and when pushed the box rolls over the bees rather than encouraging them to enter.</p> <p>To close, the box must be lifted to free the flap. There will be bees at the opening, so it is not 'comfortable'.</p>
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The box will need some holes punched in the side to allow air exchange. Do not make them too large or the bees will get out through them. Cut the opening at the bottom of one end, and put the box near the bees on the ground. Try to place the opening as close to the bulk of the bees as possible by slowly pushing the box (with a broom) into the swarm so that the bees are well aware of the opening to a dark place.

Once the first bees enter, they will encourage more to follow and within 15-20 minutes most of the bees will be in the box. They will cluster inside at the top, and begin building a nest. After the flap is closed the box can be carried to a cool location, and then either contact a removalist or the local bee guild to come and pick up the boxed swarm.

TIMING: The homeowner should not delay after seeing a swarm arrive in a building. There is a window of three weeks to take action that minimizes the difficulty (cost) involved in a solution.

- Bees typically live 6-8 weeks
- The first half is spent as housebees (e.g. nursing brood)
- The second half is spent as foragers (gathering pollen and nectar)
- The bees which leave in the swarm with the queen are mostly foragers
- It takes 3 weeks from being laid as an egg for a bee to hatch (brood)
- By the time the first eggs in the new nest hatch, over half the swarm bees will no longer be alive
- Building the nest, feeding the larvae and themselves is a dedicated effort by the swarm bees
- There is little chance to lay up any stores. Most of the pollen and nectar brought into the nest is consumed as rapidly as it arrives

The colony shrinks in size until the first generation of brood is born. At this stage there are from 6-8 honeycombs, the center areas are packed with brood, and most of the rest is empty cells, ready for brood or storage.

As a general rule, nests should always be removed from a cavity because they will collapse in hot weather and that leads into honey spreading everywhere and causing damage. The one exception is a nest that is less than three weeks old because there is only a little honey, it is mostly wax and brood, so the risk of damage from a collapse is low.

CAUTION: Do not assume that becoming aware of bees means they have newly arrived. Bees are inconspicuous, and can be resident in a location for months or years without attracting attention. Unless one sees the swarm arrive, it should be assumed that the bees have been present for some time, and there may be a nest in situ.