

Juniper Hill Split Method

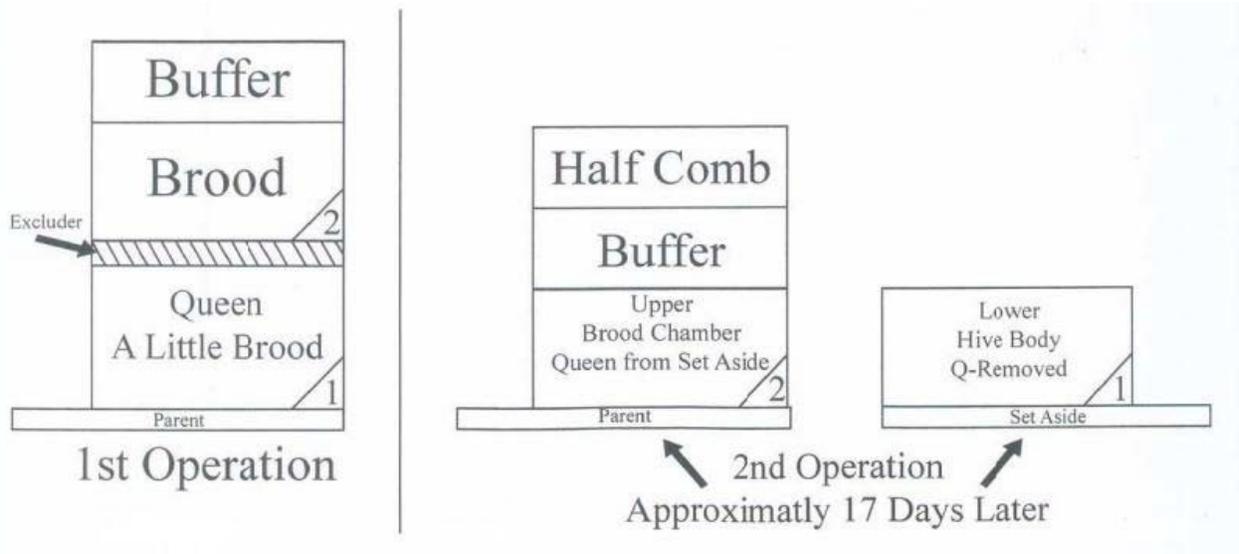
Production of comb honey is not difficult but requires very strong colonies and an intense honey flow. The challenge is to make colonies very strong without inducing swarming. Many different techniques have been described to provide strong colonies at the time of the major honey flow. John Hogg, Galesburg, Michigan, who invented and marketed the Hogg Halfcomb, developed and promoted the Juniper Hill Plan, named after his apiary, for producing Halfcombs. John made several modifications to his plan over the years. The plan, as modified and used by Herman Danenhower of Kutztown Pennsylvania, is presented here. It is important to note that all beekeeping is local. The timing of manipulations is based on local honey flows. The goal of the manipulations is to provide a peak force of field bees in a colony that has gotten past the urge to swarm at the start of the major flow.

First Operation

Herman starts during the dandelion bloom (mid-April to early May in southern Pennsylvania). He selects strong overwintered colonies in two deep brood chambers. The hive is arranged so that the queen and two frames of brood are placed in the bottom brood box below an excluder. Most of the brood remains in the second brood box above the excluder. A shallow or medium super is added to the hive. This super is the "buffer." It provides room for nectar storage and helps prevent pollen storage in the comb honey cassettes when they are added. Optionally the queen is clipped and marked at this time. The excluder should have a notch on the upper rim edge. This notch provides an exit for drones confined above the excluder. The hive is left this way for about 17 days. During this time period the bees will often produce queen cells in either the bottom or upper brood box. Any queen cells produced in the upper box will have already hatched. If there are queen cells in the bottom box at the time of the second operation they may be left and used as the replacement queen for the new (set aside) hive.

Second Operation

About 17 days after setting the colony up the colony is rearranged. The lower hive body is moved behind the original hive and placed on a second bottom board with its entrance facing the opposite direction. The upper brood box and buffer super remain in the original location. The queen is moved from the lower hive body and placed in the upper hive body on the original stand. A Halfcomb super is added at this time.



Several things have been accomplished by these manipulations. Most of the brood has hatched from the upper brood chamber. The colony on the original stand thus has a very large field force and no brood to care for. There will be plenty of field bees and little tendency to swarm because there is no brood. In effect they have already swarmed and now need to re-establish themselves. If there is a good honey flow they will fill supers rapidly. The lower hive body on the new stand has plenty of brood but no queen and a limited field force because most fielders have gone back to the original stand. If there is a queen cell it can be left for the new colony. If no queen cell, the “set-aside” can be allowed to raise a queen or can be given a laying queen. The hive will build up fairly quickly because there is plenty of brood to help the colony maintain population before the new queen starts producing brood.

Adding Supers

A second Halfcomb super is added when the first is about half-filled. Filled supers should be removed as soon as they are fully capped. Prompt removal provides pristine white cappings which really show off the beauty of the comb. Triangle escape boards work well for removing bees from filled supers. Avoid fume boards so there is no possibility of off flavors or odors. One error often made is adding more supers as the season is winding down. The goal is sections which are rapidly drawn, filled and capped. Err on the side of too few comb honey supers.

In the late 19th century, comb honey was the primary product marketed by American beekeepers. Today, many people are not even familiar with comb honey. It fits well into the today’s eat local trend and most people really like it. Comb honey offers several advantages to the beekeeper. High quality sections sell for premium prices. An extractor as well as settling and bottling tanks are not needed. Try the Hogg Halfcombs; you may discover another rewarding beekeeping opportunity.