



A Nucleus Colony? Packaged Bees? Which Should I Choose?

As with many questions in beekeeping, the answer to the above question is “it depends.” Both nucs and packages offer certain advantages and disadvantages, depending on a number of factors such as the type of equipment you will be using, your personal schedule, or your budget.

Nucleus colonies consist of what we would call “mixed race” bees, meaning they are not “purebred” of one type or another. We have been very happy with the nucs our suppliers produce, however, and we think you will be, too. Nucs come with 5 deep frames which consist of brood at all stages, honey, pollen, and extra space for the bees to build on. The queen is already laying eggs.

You will want to consider a nucleus colony if

- you would like to get an early start on honey production;
- you are using standard deep hive bodies as brood chambers; and
- you will be comfortable working with a large population early in the season.

Packaged bees are Italians. They come in a screened box with a can of syrup to feed on in transit. They also come with a mated queen in a separate cage, which the bees release, with your help, soon after they are installed in the hive.

You will want to consider packaged bees if

- you will be using top bar hive or something other than a Langstroth-style hive, or will use all medium boxes;
- you want a little time to get used to your bees before they build up a large population;
- you would like to start your colony when the weather is a more consistently warm; and/or
- you are on a tight budget.

One final thought to keep in mind--while both nucs and packages can and do occasionally swarm early, nucs tend to build up more quickly and swarm more readily than packages do. Providing plenty of space and feeding syrup is critical for both nucs and packages, as it will help prevent swarming. If this is a concern for you, you may wish to go with a package.

No matter which you choose, we know you will be happy with your choice. Feel free to call us at 800-632-3379 with any other questions you may have.