

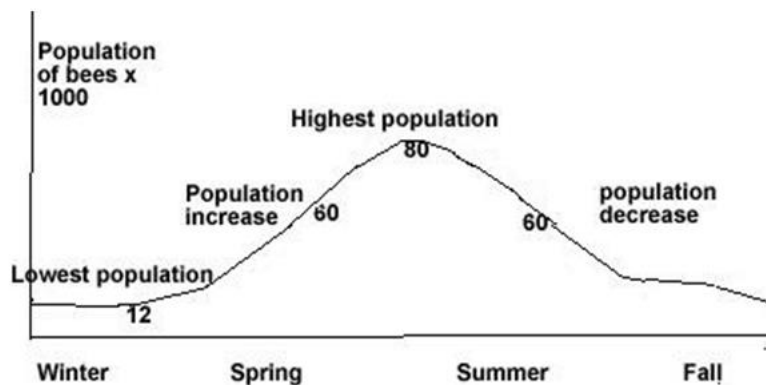


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STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING NOTES FOR 2025

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A Year in the life of a honey bee colony



This year has just begun and the swing of weather conditions from warm afternoons to freezing over night temperatures is hard on bees.

I decided to share this population growth cycle of a colony's normal growth during the four bee seasons.

We are in the winter season and there is little the bees can do. Flight days even in the south are restricted to weather conditions typical of winter. The management of bees is critical before winter arrives. About the only thing we as beekeepers can do is make sure the hives are well protected from wind and starvation. Fortunately, there are breaks in cold weather conditions. It is during those times that a beekeeper can check on food stores.

One of the weather issues this year is the south is getting record snow and cold. Most queens and package bees come from states that are now facing snow and cold air. From Texas to Florida beekeepers are seeing something rare in how they will manage bees. The consequences will be a delay in queen production, package bee production and early nuc hives being available. This is going to have an impact on those that move bees to California for Almond pollination. **2025 is shaping up to be real challenging for those wanting to buy bees.**

At one time, I sold package bees and queens. I moved my bees from Ohio to southern Georgia to take advantage of warm weather conditions. I started raising queens in mid-February and feeding my bees so that I could start shaking package bees by late March. The market for package sales in Ohio is usually no sooner than early April. Here in North Carolina, packages are usually available in March. If weather patterns hold as they are this year, everyone will be adjusting calendar dates back by several weeks or more.



I am pointing this out because when I sold package bees and queens, I usually gave customers a delivery date. I fully expected to meet my delivery schedule. When I was delayed by weather conditions to deliver on schedule, it was apparent that my customers were upset. I would get phone calls demanding bees. What customers do not consider is the labor required to get bees out of bee hives and the work necessary to have colonies produce bees on schedule. The bee inventory is not in some warehouse just ready to be plucked off a shelf.

If one is just getting into beekeeping, realize that weather is not something we can control. There is a lot of luck involved in keeping bees.



The work involved in putting bees into a package is the result of a team working in the bee yard. It is organized and work starts early in the day.

Queens must be transferred from nuc boxes as shown here into protective queen cages. Bees must be managed so that beekeepers have bee populations to shake.

And work schedules all depend on good weather conditions to carry out the work involved.



If bees are ordered and delivery dates given, you should also plan for delays. Let me share a few stories about customers I dealt with.

These are true examples of what a person selling bees may face:

I always returned from Georgia on a Friday with a load of package bees for customers. All customers were given a pick-up time when I took orders. I had learned that if customers did not pay up front, they sometimes decided not to show up on time and expected me to be available maybe on Sunday and when Sunday came and went, they had not shown and evidently decided not to get the packages. I had to return to Georgia on Monday to get bee work done and make another return trip back to Ohio the next Friday. Thus, I had to work Sunday afternoon putting package bees into hives of my own. That ended when I asked for full payment when orders were placed.

One other example of what might happen if one is selling package bees. I had a customer who picked up packages (4 3# packages). The next week when I returned, he wanted me to give him 4 packages of bees because “**my bees**” in the packages I sold to him had died. I asked him, what did he do to cause them to die? He indicated that he was busy and left the 4 packages in his garage and when he decided he was ready to hive them, they were dead. He felt it was my fault they starved to death “because there was not enough syrup in the cans to keep the bees alive for another 2 or 3 days.” Let me say that I did take the 4 packages with dead bees with me back to Georgia, and shook more bees into the packages with new queens. He became a good customer and friend for many years. I made him aware that packages of bees need to be transferred to hives almost immediately. Keep in mind that his packages of bees may have been shook on Wednesday and he did not get them until Saturday. There was syrup in the cans with the packages when he picked them up. By the way, that was when queens were sold for \$6.00 each and a package of bees sold for \$20.00. Moral of the story: **Install your bees in hives as soon as possible after you pick them up or spray sugar syrup on the wire screen several times daily to keep them alive. If your package of bees dies, just maybe the person that sold the bees to you would say, “They were alive when you left here with them. At that point they were “your” bees – not mine!”**

Believe me, now is the time to order bees if you need them to replace dead-out hives or are just getting started.

I have been asked about what it takes to go into the bee business. Having been there and done that, I will in future issues address some of the things one must consider.