

ARE YOUR HIVES READY FOR WINTER?



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A synopsis of Best Management Practices (BMPs), excerpted from Paul Kozak's recent InfoSheet to ensure that you have given your colonies the best chance for winter survival. For the full OMAFRA information sheet and other relevant information visit www.ontariobee.com/outreach/ttp
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■ 1. HAVE THEY GOT ENOUGH TO EAT?

Providing sufficient food stores will minimize the chances of starvation for a healthy populous colony. If they are short on stores, you may need to feed fondant or pollen supplement in late winter/early spring.

- Going into winter, single brood colonies should weigh at least 31.9 kg/70 lb, doubles 45.5 kg/100 lb.
- A full size colony with a fall honey crop typically requires 15L (4 gal) of supplement feed. Bees need to be fed before it gets too cold for them to access (about 13°C/55F). Colonies should be fed thick syrup (2:1 sugar/water).

■ 2. HAVE THEY GOT A GOOD SIZE POPULATION GOING INTO WINTER?

A large cluster of bees will be able to keep warm without using as much energy and feed. The larger the colony, the more likely it is to make it to spring. Seven to eight frames of bees in a full-sized colony are ideal in most of Ontario. Milder climates can get away with less.

■ 3. IS THE COLONY HEALTHY AND RELATIVELY PEST FREE (PARTICULARLY VARROA)?

- Did you inspect your brood chambers and monitor throughout the summer and into the fall?
- If your varroa mite levels required treatment, did you treat early? If higher varroa levels persist into fall, the bees that are raised for winter will be weakened and the colony will go into the winter in poor health.
- Did you monitor before and after treatment?

■ 4. DID YOU WRAP YOUR COLONIES FOR WINTER?

- Place material (paper, cardboard, insulated plastic, Styrofoam, wooden boxes with wood shavings, etc) on or around the exterior of the hive for insulation/windbreak.
- Reduce the entrance of the colony.
- Provide upper ventilation with the insulation for excess moisture and CO2 release.

■ 5. ARE YOU KEEPING RECORDS?

- Don't forget to register your colonies and apiaries with OMAFRA apiary@ontario.ca
- Watch for new pests and diseases and report any of these to the Apiary Program.
- Report atypical losses of honey bee colonies and colony decline to the Apiary Program.
- Report any suspected pesticide incidents or sublethal effects of pesticides to Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) at (519) 826-2895.
- Maintain detailed records on colony management (treatments, movements, purchases, disease monitoring, etc.). Keep receipts.