



Lazy Beekeeping

Presentations online

- Before you take copious notes, all these presentations are online here:

<http://www.bushfarms.com/beespresentations.htm>

Bee Camp

- <http://www.bushfarms.com/beescamp.htm>

"Everything works if you let it"

—Rick Nielsen of Cheap Trick

In the past few years I've changed most of how I keep bees. Most of it was to make it less work. I'm now keeping about two hundred hives with only a little more work than I used to put into four. Here are some of the things I've changed.



Top Entrances

Advantages of top entrance only

- No cutting grass
- No shovelling snow
- No mouse guards to put on
- No skunks to deal with
- Better ventilation
- Cheaper and easier to make
- Safer in the winter (no clogged entrance)
- Lower hive
- Less condensation

Caveat

- Just remember, if you have no bottom entrance and you use an excluder you will need some kind of drone escape on the bottom for them to get out. A 3/8" hole will do.

Bottom Side of Cover



On Hive



Uniform frame size.

- The frame is the basic element of a modern bee hive.
 - Even if you have various sized boxes (as far as the number of frames they hold) if the frames are all the same depth you can put them in any of your boxes.
- Having a uniform frame size will simplify your life:
 - You can put any frame wherever you need it

Any Frame Anywhere

- You can put brood up a box to "bait" the bees up.
- You can put honey combs in for food wherever you need it.
- You can unclog a brood nest by moving pollen or honey up a box or even a few frames of brood up a box to make room in the brood nest to prevent swarming.
- If you have brood in a super, you can just move it down into the brood box.

Uniform Frame Size

- I cut all my deeps down to mediums.



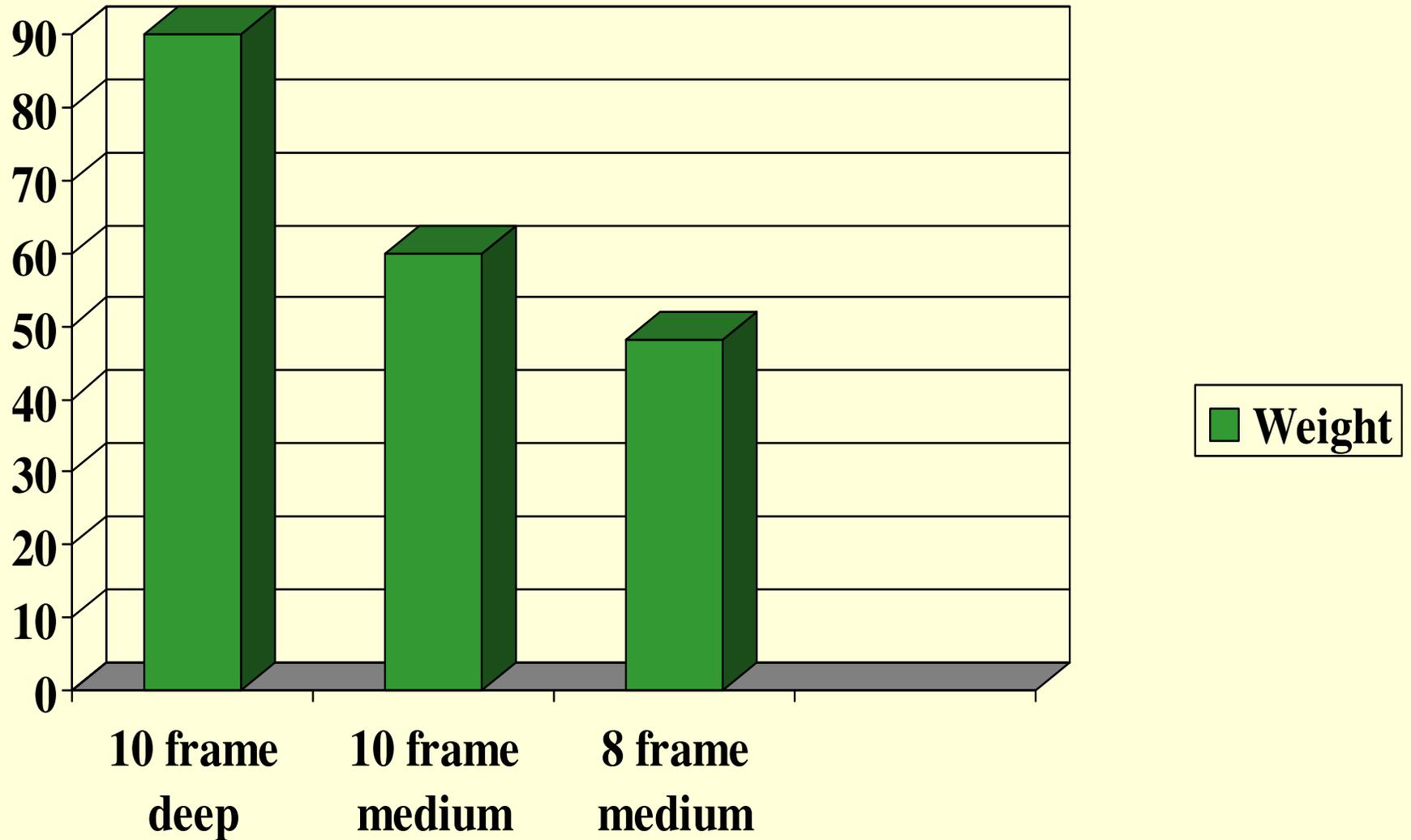
Lighter Boxes

"Friends don't let friends lift deeps"

--Jim Fischer

- The hardest thing (at least for me) about beekeeping is lifting.
- Boxes full of honey are heavy. Deep boxes full of honey are VERY heavy.

Comparative weight of full boxes



Getting a feel for this

- If you want a grasp of these and don't have a hive yet, go to the hardware store and stack up two fifty pound boxes of nails or, at the feed store, two fifty pound bags of feed. This is approximately the weight of a full deep. Now take one off and lift one box. This is approximately the weight of a full eight frame medium.

My opinion

- I find I can lift about fifty pounds pretty well, but more is usually a strain that leaves me hurting the next few days. The most versatile size frame is a medium and a box of them that weighs about 50 pounds is an eight frame

How to convert to mediums

- Just buy mediums instead of other sizes
- Cut down deep boxes
- Cut down deep frames
- Add onto shallow boxes

Converting to 8 frame boxes

- Only buy 8 frame boxes
- Use existing 10 frame boxes for brood and use 8 frame boxes for supers



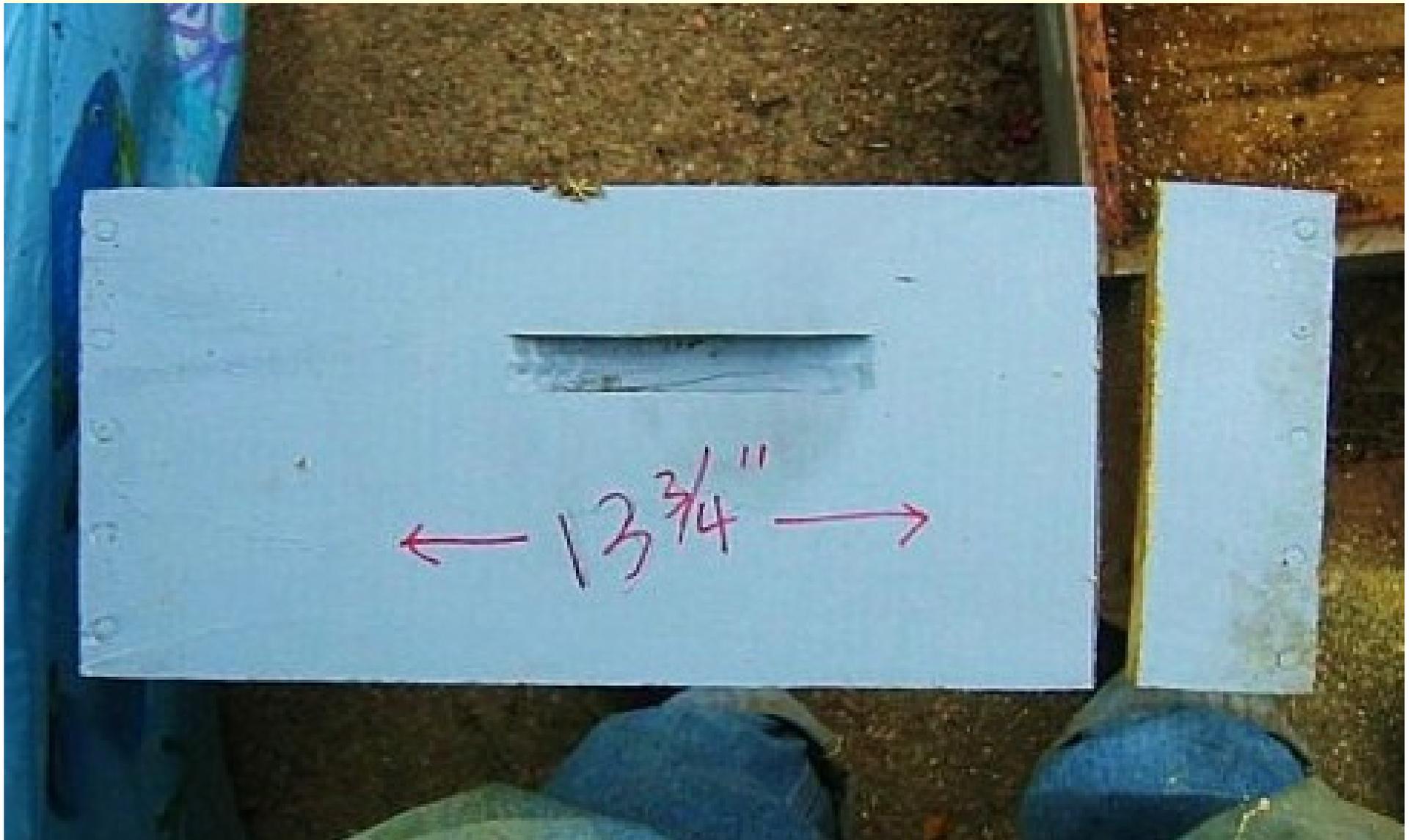
8 frame

10 frame

8 frame



Cutting Down Ten Frame Boxes



Cutting Down Ten Frame Boxes



"...no man's back is unbreakable and even beekeepers grow older. When full, a mere shallow super is heavy, weighing forty pounds or more. Deep supers, when filled, are ponderous beyond practical limit."

--Richard Taylor, The Joys of Beekeeping

Foundationless Frames



Foundationless

- How much time do you spend putting in foundation, wiring it, tearing it out because it sagged and crumpled, fell out of the frame or was misdrawn?
- I don't do much of that lately. I mostly use foundationless instead.
- And that's not even taking into account the cost of foundation, let alone small cell foundation.
- It saves me a lot of work.
- And I get clean wax instead of contaminated foundation

Natural Cell Size

- Of course you get this with foundationless frames, but the "side effect" (or the effect if it's what you were looking for) is not only the labor you save wiring wax or buying and inserting foundation, but once the Varroa mites are under control and your mite counts have stayed stable for a couple of years, you might even be able to forget about Varroa.
- It is very nice to be back to just worrying about the bees instead of the mites.

Making foundationless frames

- You can cut a triangle off of the corner of a $\frac{3}{4}$ " board and have a triangle that on it's broad side is $1 \frac{1}{16}$ ". This can be nailed and glued to the bottom of a top bar to make a peak that the bees will attach to. Some people rub some bees wax on, I haven't bothered. Once you've made these frames you won't need to put starter strips or foundation in them. Or you can just cut a 45 on each side of a top bar before you put the frame together.

Making foundationless frames

- Also you can put empty frames with no guides between drawn combs and you can put frames with a top row of cells left on the top bar in anywhere you'd put a frame of foundation.

No chemicals/no artificial feed.

- Going to no chemicals saves a lot of work, trouble and expense. All the frames are "clean" so you don't have to worry about residue. If you only feed honey, it's all honey and you don't have to worry what might be syrup instead. You can harvest honey from where ever you find it. And of course you don't have to put in (and pull out) strips, mix up Fumidil syrup and dust with Terramycin, treat with menthol, make grease patties, fog with FGMO, make up cords, evaporate Oxalic acid. Just think of all the spare time you'll have. And how clean your honey will be.

Leave honey for winter food.

- Instead of feeding, just leave them enough. You don't have to harvest it. You don't have to extract it. You don't have to make syrup. You don't have to feed them for winter.

Leave honey for winter food.

Plus there may be other advantages:

- "It is well known that improper diet makes one susceptible to disease. Now is it not reasonable to believe that extensive feeding of sugar to bees makes them more susceptible to American Foul Brood and other bee disease? It is known that American Foul Brood is more prevalent in the north than in the south. Why? Is it not because more sugar is fed to bees in the north while here in the south the bees can gather nectar most of the year which makes feeding sugar syrup unnecessary?"--
Better Queens, Jay Smith

Leave honey for winter food.

Honey helps the bees' immune system:

In the study “Symbionts as Major Modulators of Insect Health: Lactic Acid Bacteria and Honeybees” it was shown that the bees have a biofilm made up of beneficial bacteria that protects their gut and makes up part of their immune system. The studies of Martha Gillam have shown that feeding sugar syrup disrupts the natural flora of the gut.

Carts: Brushy Mt. Modified



Carts: Mann Lake Modified

Designed by
Jerry
Hosterman
of Arizona



Carts:
Walter T.
Kelley



Carts

- Carts have really helped me with my back. My main yard is across the pasture from my house. Moving boxes, both full and empty, back and forth is a lot of work. It's hardly worth loading the boxes in my van to drive around the long way to get to the hives or visa versa. But it's a long carry. I bought three carts and have used all of them to advantage. I mostly use the Mann Lake and the Walter T. Kelley ones right now.

Leave the burr comb between boxes.

- Here's one I think helps the bees, They often build comb between the boxes and often put drone cells there leaving it has these advantages:
 - monitor for mites on drone pupae that breaks open
 - makes a nice ladder for the queen to get from one box to the next.

Leave Burr Comb and Propolis

- "Some beekeepers dismantle every hive and scrape every frame, which is pointless as the bees soon glue everything back the way it was." --The How-To-Do-It book of Beekeeping, Richard Taylor

Stop scraping all the propolis off of everything.

- Doesn't it feel like a losing battle anyway? The bees will just replace it, so unless it's directly in your way, why bother?
- "Propolis rarely creates problems for a beekeeper. Certainly any effort to keep a hive free of it by systematic and frequent scraping, is time wasted." --The How-To-Do-It book of Beekeeping, Richard Taylor

Stop cutting out swarm cells.

- I read the books and I tried to do this when I was young, inexperienced and foolish. The bees soon taught me what a waste of time and effort it was. If the bees have made up their mind to swarm, do a split or put each frame with some swarm cells in a nuc with a frame of honey and get some nice queens. Once they've gone this far, I've never seen them change their mind.

Stop fighting your bees.

- I don't know how often I see questions on bee forums asking how can I make the bees do this or that. Well, you can't MAKE them do anything. In the end they do what bees do no matter what you try to make them do. You can help them out, by making sure they have the resources they need to do what you think they need to do and by manipulating the hive so they don't swarm. You can fool them into making queens and such. But you'll have a lot more fun and work a lot less if you stop trying to make them do anything.

Rule of Thumb

- "There are a few rules of thumb that are useful guides. One is that when you are confronted with some problem in the apiary and you do not know what to do, then do nothing. Matters are seldom made worse by doing nothing and are often made much worse by inept intervention." --
The How-To-Do-It book of Beekeeping, Richard Taylor

Stop wrapping your hives.

I suppose this also includes all the worrying about winter and trying to give them heaters and such. The bees have lived for millions of years with no heaters and no help. If you make sure they are strong and have enough food and adequate ventilation so they don't end up in an icicle, then you should relax. Work on your equipment and see them in the spring, or at the earliest, late winter.

Winter

"Although we now and again have to put up with exceptionally severe winters even here in the south-west, we do not provide our colonies with any additional protection. We know that cold, even severe cold, does not harm colonies that are in good health. Indeed, cold seems to have a decided beneficial effect on bees."--
Beekeeping at Buckfast Abbey, Brother Adam

Winter

"Nothing has been said of providing warmth to the colonies, by wrapping or packing hives or otherwise, and rightly so. If not properly done, wrapping or packing can be disastrous, creating what amounts to a damp tomb for the colony" --The How-To-Do-It book of Beekeeping, Richard Taylor

Stop painting your equipment.

- You've probably noticed by now, if you looked at pictures of my hives, that a lot of them are not painted. Maybe the neighbors or the wife will complain but the bees won't care. They might not last as long. I don't know because I only stopped painting them about four years ago. But think of all the time you'll save!

I'm not the only one

- "The hives need no painting, although there is no harm in doing it if their owner wants to please his own eye. The bees find their way to their own hives more easily if the hives do not all look alike. I rarely paint mine, and as a result no two are quite alike. Most have the appearance of many years of use and many seasons of exposure to the elements." --Richard Taylor, The Joys of Beekeeping

I'm not the only one

- "I suppose they would last longer if painted, but hardly enough longer to pay for the paint." --C.C. Miller, Fifty Years Among the Bees

Rosin Dipping

- Lately I bought a lot of equipment and wanted to keep it as nice as I could for as long as I could so I started dipping them in beeswax and gum rosin.



Stop switching hive bodies.

In my opinion switching hive bodies is counterproductive. It's a lot of work for the beekeeper and it's a lot of work for the bees. After you swap them the bees have to rearrange the brood nest. It's true it will interrupt swarming, but so will other things.

Richard Taylor

Here's what Richard Taylor says in *The Joys of Beekeeping*:

"Some beekeepers, trusting the ways of bees less than I do, at this point routinely 'switch hive bodies,' that is, switch the positions of the two stories of each hive, thinking that this will induce the queen to increase her egg laying and distribute it more widely through the hive. I doubt, however, that any such result is accomplished, and in any case I have long since found that such planning is best left to the bees."

Don't look for the queen.

- Don't look for the queen unless you have to. It's one of the most time consuming operations. Instead look for eggs or open brood while keeping an eye out for her.
- This even works for things like setting up mating nucs. If you break up a hive for mating nucs and don't look for the queen on the frames and give to the nucs you may lose a queen, but you'll save a lot of time. She'll just get superseded.
- The only real advantage to finding the queen often is the practice but this could be more easily done with an observation hive.

Don't wait.

There are many operations where people, including me, will tell you to remove the queen and wait until the next day. This would be things like introducing queen cells to nucs or introducing a new queen to a hive. Waiting will improve the odds of acceptance, But reality is it will only improve it a little. So if you want to save time, don't wait until the next day unless you have to, do it now while you have the hive open.

Feed Dry Sugar Instead of Syrup

Sometimes you have to feed. No, they won't take dry sugar as well as they do syrup when the weather is warm, but if you **HAVE** to feed it will keep them from starving and you won't have to make syrup and you won't have to buy feeders and you won't have any drowned bees and they can eat it even when it's -20° F.

Feed Dry Sugar



Split by the box.

If you've got a booming hive you want to split in the spring, don't look for the queen, don't look for brood except to peek from the top of the box, just split it by boxes. The bottom two boxes that are seriously occupied by bees probably have brood in them. Of course success is mostly dependent on being able to guess pretty accurately that you have brood and stores in both boxes. If you're wrong, you'll end up with one box empty after only a day or so. But if you are right, you've saved a lot of work.

Equipment Synopsis

- **Top entrances**
- **Uniform frame size**
- **Lighter boxes**
- **Foundationless frames**
- **Natural cell size**
- **Carts**
- **Stop wrapping your hives**
- **Stop painting**

Management Synopsis

- **No chemicals/no artificial feed.**
- **Leave honey for winter food.**
- **Leave the burr comb**
- **Stop cutting swarm cells**
- **Stop fighting your bees**
- **Stop scraping propolis**
- **Stop switching hive bodies**
- **Don't look for the queen**
- **Don't wait**
- **Feed dry sugar**
- **Split by the box**

Contact

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Book: The Practical Beekeeper