

Catching a Swarm of Honeybees

Tools needed – you can never have too much

- 8' Step Ladder
- 2 -30-gallon trash cans
- 8' tarp or white bedsheet
- a couple buckets
- 10' ratchet strap
- spray bottle w/water
- spray bottle w/sugar water
- loppers, and hand pruner
- stapler
- one eighth hardware cloth
- duct tape
- lemon essential oil
- Lysol spray
- Bee brush
- pheromone optional
- queen catcher
- Smoker
- Bee vacuum if you have one just in case you need it
- 50-100' electric cord
- 12-15' telescoping fiberglass painter's pole.

Questions to ask

- Are you sure they are honeybees?
- Can landowner take a picture and send it by text or e-mail?
- Where are they?
- Are they a swarm or a cutout?
- Hanging on a limb or a swing set, mailbox, etc.
- How high are they?
- How long have they been there?
- How big is the swarm? As big as a football, bigger or smaller.
- Be sure to get a name, address, phone number, directions. Is electric accessible?
- Are they on your property?
- Will someone be home?
- Ask them to look again just to be sure before you leave.
- Ask them to call you if the bees leave.
- Ask if anyone has sprayed them? If so, forget it you're done.

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The Process

1. Position your ladder safely and level.
2. Lay down tarp or sheet with weights on corners to keep from blowing in wind. Put it fairly close to swarm and ladder.
3. Lay ratchet strap down on tarp then center bottom board over strap.
4. Next place hive body or nuc box with frames over ratchet strap.
5. A frame of drawn comb is a plus. Queen can start laying right away. Open brood is even better.
6. Spray frames and foundation with sugar syrup one at a time and replace leaving one or two out. Now you are ready.
7. Light smoker and put on your jacket, veil, and gloves.

Note: I almost never cut branches if possible. I like to spray the bees with water.

8. Set spray bottle on spray and spray them on all sides. It causes them to snuggle tighter together. It reduces the flying when shook into the trash can.
9. Climb the ladder with trash can and hold it under bees to see if you are comfortable with the location of ladder or need to tweak it a little.
10. Take one moment to look at setup. All is ready. This can all be done in about ten minutes if you have done a few swarms. Don't rush. Safety first. Check for bystanders, etc.
11. Carry a trash can and water bottle up together. Spray the cluster with water and hang bottle on side of ladder or small branch.
12. Hold trash can about 18 inches directly below the bees. Get a good grip on the branch above or below the bees depending which is easiest and will dislodge them the best.
13. Give it a good hard shake and then quickly do it one more time before quickly and safely going down the ladder. One hand on ladder and the other on the handle of trash can.
14. Aim for center of hive and gently dump them into the center of the hive body and frames. If you have to shake the limb a second time I like to dump them right on the front porch against the front of hive.

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15. Primary swarms hive fairly easily. The leftover frames can be gently added in a few minutes. Allow the bees to move out of the way as the frames are gently added. You will find that bees yield to gentle pressure. Gently slide on the inner cover starting in rear when possible.
16. Next you can put on the telescoping cover and wrap the hive with the ratchet strap tightly.
17. Take a couple small handfuls of grass and push it in the entrance with your hive tool leaving a small opening about a half inch.
18. The bees are now ready to transport to their final location. You can leave the hive overnight and pick up the next morning or evening if you want, however, you should put them in the hive and place them as soon as possible.
19. Put in back of truck and tie off so hive doesn't slide around.

Note: If using a box or vacuum system be sure to keep them cool. They can easily overheat. You can lose bees in the shade to overheating in less than 2 hours. Spring swarms are very motivated and build quickly.

20. Early the next morning remove the grass and the bees will take their orientation flight.
21. Over the next few days be sure to give them plenty of sugar syrup as feed until they get established. In a week to ten days you can check for eggs, or larva to determine if you have a viable queen. Possibly a little longer if she was a virgin.

One benefit of joining SCBA is you are able to join our Swarm List and pick two counties of your choice.