

Guidelines for initial care of your bees

1. When you get your bees home it is best to leave the box undisturbed for an hour to let the bees settle down. Make sure they are in a cool shady place.
2. Prepare your hive, in its intended position, with a gap big enough for the five frames in the nuc. The entrance block should be in, with the entrance open.
3. Prepare sugar syrup – ratio 1 kg white granulated sugar dissolved in 1 litre of hot tap water. Do not use any other kinds of sugar (even 'unbleached'), which can be toxic to bees. Start with at least 2 kg of sugar made up. (You can also use specialist bee syrup such as Ambrosia, but this is more expensive.)
4. Put the unopened nuc box right next to your hive. Suit up, gloves on, light your smoker and give the bees in the box a little smoke through the mesh/holes. Leave for a couple of minutes. Open the nuc box and transfer the frames quickly and carefully one by one into the centre of your hive. Keep the frames in exactly the same order and orientation as in the nuc. You may see the queen – marked green for 2024 – but don't spend time looking for her at this stage. Shake any remaining bees from the nuc box into the hive.
5. Replace your frames of foundation on each side of the 5 frames from the nuc. Make sure the frames are always correctly spaced – which for Hoffman self-spacing frames means pushed tightly together. This is very important otherwise the bees may build out the combs too widely or build wild comb between your foundation.
6. Put on the crownboard, then put on a feeder with syrup over one of the feed holes. In the summer you can use either a contact feeder or a rapid feeder, but a rapid feeder is easier because you can refill it without disturbing the bees. (If using a rapid feeder, trickle a little syrup down the centre hole to alert the bees to the presence of food above their heads.) Cover the other feed hole in the crownboard. Put on an empty super (to house the feeder) then the roof.
7. There are three aims of this feeding:
 - to ensure that your bees do not starve (if the weather turns bad, or if there is a gap in the nectar flow, they may use up the stores they came with.)
 - to free up foragers to collect more pollen and so produce more brood
 - to give them a guaranteed 'income' to help them to draw the wax in your foundation.We recommend that you keep feeding until all the foundation in the brood box is drawn. (But make sure that you do not allow the bees to lay down so much stores in the brood box that the queen's space to lay is restricted. This is a bit of a balance – if the weather is good, you can probably stop feeding after a week.)
8. Leave the bees to settle in their new home for a couple of days before inspecting. After this time the bees may be starting to draw out the nearest frames of foundation. You can/should encourage the bees to carry on drawing foundation by transferring these frames of foundation inwards towards the cluster of bees, 'between brood and food' – in other words, between the last frame with brood on it and the first frame with stores on it. Take care not to split the brood with the new frame. As they complete each frame, do the same thing with the next one. You can do this as part of your normal weekly inspection.
9. Do keep inspecting the bees at least weekly – it is unlikely that they will make swarm preparations, but not impossible.
10. Once you've got all the foundation in the brood box drawn - and only then - you can put on a queen excluder and your first super. Do not feed when you have a super on, otherwise you may get sugar in your honey. (If you put on the super before all your brood box frames are drawn, they will start drawing the super frames but may well neglect the undrawn frames downstairs, and you will need the brood box frames to be fully drawn to hold the bees' winter stores.)
11. Thereafter follow normal beekeeping guidelines. In particular we recommend that you use an approved treatment against varroa, starting in early August, and follow the on-pack instructions exactly.