

# Goodbye Spring, Hello Summer

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June is a transition month for Piedmont NC beekeepers. It marks the end of the spring honey flow and the beginning of preparations for summer. The last big task of the season, harvesting, is often done this month, followed by a relatively slow period on the beekeeping calendar. The primary goal in summer is simply to keep your bees alive and healthy until fall.

Most folks in this area harvest around the end of June or the first part of July. Extractors are ridiculously expensive so many local beekeeping clubs have extractors that they loan out to members. This lets you “try before you buy”. If you decide to bite the bullet and invest in an extractor, I recommend getting a least a nine-frame model. Loading, cranking and unloading becomes tedious after a while. The larger the extractor, the fewer rounds you need to do. Also note that it is much more expensive to convert a manual model to make it motorized than it is to buy a motorized model from the outset, so the smart move is to go ahead and spend more now if you don't enjoy cranking by hand.

You don't have to harvest using an extractor but it is the most efficient method. It keeps the bees from having to expend energy to recreate wax combs every season. Bees must consume a lot of honey to make wax. But if you don't mind having a smaller honey harvest, you can make cut comb honey instead of using an extractor, or simply crush the comb in cheesecloth and press out the honey. Any of these methods can be done using standard Langstroth frames. You simply need to use the right type of foundation, if you use any at all, to compliment the way you intend to harvest.

Regardless of the technique you choose, make sure to harvest supers within a day or two of pulling them off the hives. Otherwise small hive beetle larvae will likely take up residence on the unprotected comb.

With harvesting out of the way, you'll want to assess your bees for their varroa mite load. As your bee population rapidly expanded during the honey flow, so did your varroa mite population. It is common for large, bustling colonies to crash in mid to late summer as the effects of varroa overwhelm the bees. Colony death isn't directly due to the varroa mite itself, but instead it comes from the many bee viruses that the mite spreads throughout the hive. This is one reason that a severely infested hive can be successfully treated for varroa and then still die. The varroa may be gone but the viruses remain. It is also one reason that half-hearted varroa treatments don't work in the long run.

An equally important summer management task is to assess your colonies' food reserves. In our area, there is a dearth of nectar sources during the summer. Yes, there are a few flowering plants around, but not nearly enough to support the large bee populations that build up in the spring. It is easy for colonies to starve in the summer if you don't keep an eye on their honey stores.

Summer is a great time to become a better beekeeper by attending a conference. The North Carolina State Beekeepers are meeting in Pinehurst on July 11-13. Advance registration is only \$25 (<http://www.ncbeekeepers.org>). A little farther down the road, South Carolina's beekeepers are meeting July 25-27 at Clemson (<http://www.scstatebeekeepers.org>). The Heartland Apicultural Society has an

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outstanding conference scheduled for July 11-13 at Tennessee Tech in Cookeville, Tennessee (<http://heartlandbees.org>). If you can't get away, your county beekeepers' association offers an interesting program each and every month (<http://www.ncbeekeepers.org/chapters.htm>).

Enjoy the summer lull. Fall brings new challenges and it starts sooner than you think!

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