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MATING NUCS

Mating nucs are small hive setups that use minimal resources to house some nurse bees and a queen cell or a virgin queen until the queen is mated and begins laying. If the queen is successful on her mating flights and safely returns to the mating nuc, she should be laying and ready to move to a larger hive setup in about 30 days.

Honey and The Hive offers 2-frame mating nucs in both deep frame and medium frame sizes. They include telescoping tops that are drilled to accept mason jar nipple feeders which only require a ¼ inch hole through the lid. They are also a little deeper than typical deep or medium boxes and a little wider than what is needed for two frames. Both of these dimensional variations are intentional to avoid damage to the swarm or queen cells that are placed in the mating nuc. The extra depth provides additional space below the frame when introducing cells that are located on the bottom of a frame and the extra width provides extra room for cells that are on the side of a frame. And the extra space shouldn't result in any major issues since the mating nuc isn't intended to be used for long term housing.



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Mating nucs can be used to “grow” queens from swarm cells. If you have a colony that has or is about to swarm, it's very likely some of your “extra” swarm cells will be on different frames. You could move a frame with some of these extra swarm cells and one other frame of some stores and empty space (and the bees that are on them) into one of these mating nucs, feed them some 1:1 syrup, and wait. Or if your “extra” swarm cells aren't on different frames, the extras could be cut out and placed on other frames. In a month or so, you may have a mated, laying queen for the “price” of as few as two frames of resources.

But you could also *not* have a mated queen. There are many reasons a virgin queen may not get mated and return to the mating nuc. The weather may not cooperate, there may be Angry Birds in the neighborhood, or the virgin queen may have an unfortunate meet and greet with a Toyota Camry. But consider this – the virgin queen that emerges from a queen cell in the hive that swarmed is going to face the same hardships. Having more than one virgin queen attempting to get mated improves your odds of ending up with a mated queen. For the price of two frames of resources, that is some pretty cheap insurance.

And speaking of cheap insurance, the mating nuc is also useful when requeening a hive. Instead of pinching the old queen when you want to introduce a new queen to your colony, put her in a mating nuc with two frames from her colony while you wait for your new queen to be accepted. If your new queen isn't accepted (and it does happen), then you still have the old queen and you can return her to her colony while you try to find another queen. And if your new queen is accepted by her new entourage, great! Now you can pinch the old girl and return the frames to the original colony. Or, you could leave her in the mating nuc and give her a second chance to impress you. At worst, she fails and you put the two frames back in another hive. But maybe, given a stay of execution, she is scared straight and begins a new colony for you.

The mating nuc can also be used to get some diversity in your apiary's gene pool. Maybe you know of and have access to an area that has some feral bees that have been surviving on their own for years (they are out there). You could stock the mating nucs with your nurse bees and your swarm cells and take them to that area for the queen to get mated by some of those drones. You just might find that diamond in the rough.

And if you're a little more ambitious, the mating nuc can be used to develop numerous mated queens without using additional frames of resources each time. Once you successfully get a queen mated and she demonstrates a good laying pattern, she can be removed, caged, and introduced to another colony. At this point, if you have queen cells available (or maybe a fellow club member does), put one or two in the mating nuc and go through the "growing" cycle again.