

Installing a Package

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A package is a collection of several pounds of bees (usually 3lbs) from multiple donor colonies used to start a new hive. The bees are transported in a small wood or plastic crate, with mesh sides. The crate contains a feeding can filled with sugar or corn syrup to sustain the bees during their travel and a small cage containing a queen. The queen is NOT from the same colony as the rest of the bees. For this reason, an acclimatization period may be necessary to ensure her acceptance by the worker bees.

You can purchase packages from several suppliers in Maine or online from national beekeeping suppliers. A list of Maine suppliers can be found here:
<http://mainebeekeepers.org/beekeeping-resources/beekeeping-equipment-and-bees/>

Upon arrival, check your package for any cracks, tears in the screen, or other damage to the box. Inspect the bees through the screen to ensure they are alive and in good health. Some dead bees in the bottom of the box is normal. If there is an excessive number of dead bees (more than ½ inch), it may be an indication that they became overheated or otherwise stressed during shipping.

On the day of installation, you will need your protective gear (veil, gloves, etc.), a hive tool, a pair of pliers, a smoker, a small nail, a spray bottle filled with sugar syrup, an entrance reducer, and a feeder filled with sugar syrup (1:1 sugar to water ratio). It is best to install the package on the day it arrives. If you cannot install the bees right away feed the package by lightly spraying sugar solution on the screens.

Installation Steps:

- 1. Lightly spray the package screen with sugar syrup.** This will calm the bees
- 2. Remove four to five frames from your hive.** This will create a space for the bees to be poured into.
- 3. Remove the feed can.** Using a hive tool ease off the plywood cover over the feeder can. Give the whole box a good whack on the ground. This will make the bees fall to the bottom. Use your hive tool and/or the pliers to ease out the feed can. Make

sure to hold onto the metal or plastic strip of the queen cage as you remove the can or your queen cage might fall down into the box.

4. **Remove the queen cage.** Pull it out and gently brush off any bees clinging on the outside. Inspect the queen to ensure that she is still alive and healthy. If she is not alive, call your supplier immediately. If you drop the queen cage into the package, use a long set of kitchen tongs to fish it out.
5. **Remove the cork covering the candy.** At one end of the queen cage is a small cork or wood plug covering "candy". Remove this plug with the nail. Some queen cages have two plugs, one on either end so make sure you are removing the one with the candy. It usually takes the bees a day or two to eat through the candy and release the queen from her cage. This time-release method allows the bees to become accustomed to the queen, minimizing the likelihood of queen rejection.
6. **Place the queen cage in the hive.** With the candy exposed, place the queen cage in the hive. To do this, secure the queen cage between two frames. The cage can be secured using rubber bands, thumb tacks, or by pushing the cage into the comb. Make sure the screen is exposed so the workers in the hive can feed the queen through the screen.
7. **Pour your bees.** Tap the box on the ground to loosen the bees that are clinging inside the box. Quickly flip it over above the hive while tilting the box from side to side. When most of the bees have been shaken into the hive, place the open package on the ground near the front of the hive. Any bees still in the box will eventually leave the package and walk into the hive.
8. **Close the hive.** Reinsert the frames you removed, being careful not to dislodge the queen cage. Replace the inner and telescoping covers. Install an entrance reducer and feeder.
9. **Feed the new colony.** It is very important that you supply your new colony with food (sugar syrup 1:1). Usually packages are installed early in the year when there is little natural forage available. Without supplemental feed, your new colony may die. It takes at least 8lbs of honey to produce 1lb of wax so if you are installing your package on foundation you may have to feed your hive for several months following installation.
10. **Inspect the colony 5 days after installing the package.** Make sure the queen is alive and has been released from her cage. If she is still in her cage, release her.