National Bee Unit
South West Region

Fact Sheet 3

Second-hand Equipment

Most beekeepers buy second-hand equipment at some point. Great savings can be made. Here are a few pointers to help avoid disappointment and contracting disease.

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1. **What should I check?**
   Before buying make sure that hive parts are the correct size. The dimensions can be obtained from hive plans or some bee-keeping textbooks. If the clearances are too great, brace comb will be a problem and if too small parts will be propolised i.e. gummed up. Similarly, it is worth checking the size or fit of anything else you are considering. Make sure that it is what you want!

2. **Should I buy comb?**
   Never buy second hand comb. It may harbour disease. If you should acquire it do not use it; burn it, render it down for exchange or make candles etc.
   Foundation that is professionally manufactured represents no risk to the spread of disease.

3. **What do I check when buying live bees?**
   If buying bees make sure that they are healthy. If you are not sure about the signs of disease get someone who is competent to look at them with you. Often at 'Bee Fairs' or 'Bee Auctions' an Authorised Bee Inspector will have checked the bees beforehand. The Auctioneer will usually say that this has happened. This check only means that there are no visible signs of foul brood disease at the time of examination. It is done to safeguard against the spread of disease. Don't forget to check the hive or box that the bees are in when considering a fair value. Often bees sold in hives represent better value than buying hive boxes alone.

PTO.

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4. **What should I do having acquired second-hand hives?**
When you have obtained used hives disinfect them before use. To do this, first scrape the boxes using a paint scraper, hive tool or other suitable instrument, so that the bits of wax and propolis fall onto some cardboard or newspaper. This should subsequently be burnt. Be especially careful when cleaning the internal corners of the boxes and the frame runners. Consider removing frame runners and replacing with new ones after disinfection. When done, clean your scraper; see section '6' & '8' below. Then disinfect in one of the following ways.
    a. Scorch with a blowlamp. Make sure any remaining propolis boils and that the timber darkens. There is no need to burn the timber. Be especially careful in the corners.
    b. Boil in Caustic Soda. This is not very practical for the average beekeeper due to the caustic nature of the bath and the problems of disposal of the used solution. It requires great care and caution. The method is to prepare a bath using a solution of 450g. Sodium Hydroxide to 38 ltrs. of water and bring the solution to the boil. Wooden hives parts are then immersed in the solution for between 5 and 15 minutes. Then dip the parts in clean boiling water. After drying, the parts will probably need re-nailing. YOU MUST wear suitable protective clothing when using this system.
    c. Dip into molten paraffin wax. This requires specialist equipment, which the average beekeeper does not have. For further details see a suitable bee-keeping textbook.

5. **How do I disinfect plastic components?**
Plastic components can be effectively disinfected using Sodium Hypochlorite. This is present at a concentration of about 3% in household bleach. Check the container label for details, and take suitable safety precautions. Research has shown that immersion in a solution of 0.5% Sodium Hypochlorite in water, kills American Foul Brood spores in twenty minutes. It is essential that the spores are in contact with the solution so any items immersed need to be clean.

6. **How about smokers etc?**
Smokers and hive tools should be scrubbed clean using a soapy water solution. The hive tool should be scorched off using a blowlamp. **DO NOT** heat it to the extent that you damage the metal hardening.

7. **What should I do when buying second hand Beekeeping overalls?**
These should be washed in the normal way. A small quantity of washing soda crystals mixed with the detergent helps to remove propolis. BEWARE when washing veils. It is best to wash them by hand. Putting them in a washing machine may cause damage.

8. **How can I clean propolis off equipment?**
A washing soda and water solution effectively dissolves propolis. It needs to fairly strong, about 1kg. to ten ltrs. of water. A dash of washing up liquid in the solution also helps. You will need to wear suitable protective clothing, protect your eyes and use rubber gloves e.g. 'Marigolds'.

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