

What I Learned at Gary Weaver's

By Nancy Celani Baker

OABA club member Gary Weaver hosted a workshop at his home today, Saturday, September 05, 2015. I wasn't able to attend the workshop he hosted last year, and didn't know what to expect. For other OABA members who have never attended, here's a little of what I learned in hopes that it will convince you that giving up a Saturday to learning a little more about beekeeping is a good deal.

The morning was cloudy and cool which alleviated my worries of collapsing from heat stroke from being dressed in a long-sleeved jacket, bee veil, long pants, boots and gloves. And contrary to bee lore, a cloudy day did not equate to angry bees; in fact, the girls were quite calm and mild. The topics covered were Honey Extraction, Hive Inspection, and Mite Washing, with a demo on candle making. There seemed to be beekeepers from all over Georgia, but it was hard to tell as I had arrived after the morning mingle time and went right into the hive inspection.

The very first thing I learned is that beekeepers are awesome folks. I had forgotten my gloves and the gentleman parked next to me immediately lent me a pair.

I have been learning about beekeeping since about 2010, but I've never been in anyone else's hives or worked alongside a more experienced beekeeper. These are some points I had never heard of or seen before:

- Pick a side to work your hive from and stick to it. Then when you put the frames back in the box, push them tight to the opposite side. This will give you some room to work to loosen that first frame when you next inspect your hive.

- Scrape the propolis from the top of the side edges of that first frame before you slide it back in the box. It will make removal easier next time.

- Scrape bridge comb from the between brood frames before pulling them. This will prevent it from breaking open cells and injuring bees as you lift out a frame.

- Bring a nuc box, spare super or a frame holder out with you to give you a place to put the frames you remove. This will prevent damage to the frame from laying it on the ground or accidentally knocking it off the hive stand. And it keeps the frames in order so you can return them to their original position in the box.

- When you find your queen, take the frame she's on and place it in that spare nuc pushed over a bit from the other frames in there. This will prevent her from being knocked off the frame onto the ground and you will always know where she is. When you go to replace her in the box, be sure to check that she is still there.
- One of the leaders showed how to remove a well-propolised frame from the box. After loosening it a bit with your hive tool, brace your index, ring and pinky fingers on the sides of the box. Grasp the frame between your pointer finger and thumb and rock it loose a bit. Then lift straight up and it should slide out.
- Different styles of feeding, Boardman feeders, top mounted mason jars and top mounted 1-gallon buckets, were discussed, as were techniques of avoiding robbing, feeder leakage, and escaping bees when changing feeders.
- Regarding shaking powdered sugar inside the hive on every inspection for varroa control, it was noted that you do this on the frames in the brood box as that is where the varroa mites reproduce and where most of them are found. This is also where the nurse bees are found and they are the ones that groom the other bees and remove the mites. I used to do all the frames in every box which was quite messy and upset the bees unnecessarily.
- In the honey supers, you can run one frame less than normal; 9 frames in a 10-frame box, and 7 frames in an 8-frame box. This causes the bees to build the cells deeper than usual, extending them a bit beyond the wooden frame. This makes uncapping the frames easier.
 - You would not do this in the brood boxes as the queen can't reach the bottom of the cells and either won't lay, or she will lay eggs on the side of the cell. The worker bees, knowing that this is not correct placement of the eggs will clean them out. They may also think the queen is failing or defective and try to replace her. Either way, you end up with no brood.
- One of the leaders did the math on how fast the queen can lay eggs to fill a 10-frame deep (14 days), 8-frame deep (10 days), or 5-frame deep box (7 days) and how often you need to add boxes so that she doesn't run out of room before the larva hatches and the cells are ready to be used again. Medium boxes will be filled faster, and so allow 3 boxes for brood if you are running all mediums.

- In an ideal world the queen starts laying in the bottom box, working horizontally and on each side of the frames. When the bottom box is full, she will move up to the top box, again working horizontally and end up back where she started. So the ideal pattern she lays in would be rather like a clock face, with empty cells awaiting her at each turn. If there are no empty cells awaiting her, she will start searching for them, laying in each as she finds them, resulting in a spotty brood pattern. This may lead the beekeeper to think she is not a good queen, and slows the growth of the hive.
- Worker bees don't like to cross queen excluders, so using one may keep them from working the honey supers and they may start to load honey in the brood chamber.
- A demonstration was made of balancing a hive with lots of honey, brood and bees, but not much empty space, with a hive that was light on everything. The goal was to bring the weak hive up to strength without weakening the strong hive.

A good lunch was served, and afterwards we had the chance to go to other work stations. I took a peek at the candle making. The tip I picked up there was that an electric skillet will save making a mess of my good cookware. I hope to find one at a yard sale soon. I have wax but no honey this year, so I think that the family is getting candles for Christmas. I poked my head into the Honey Extraction demonstration (awesome honey house!!!), but since I will not be extracting from my hives (I run foundationless and just cut comb out) I stayed just long enough to ooh and aah at the nice set up.

I felt the call of my own farm and family and left with my head bursting with new ideas of how to be a better beekeeper next year and a resolve to keep coming to Gary's workshops as long as he is willing to host them.