

A beekeeper wearing a white protective suit and a white hard hat is working with wooden beehives in a field. The beekeeper is leaning over a hive, and a glass jar is placed on top of it. The background shows a field of tall grass and another beehive. The overall scene is in a warm, golden-brown color palette.

Splitting Hives: Why, When, and How

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What is a split?

Splitting hives is one of the most useful tools in beekeeping—whether you’re trying to prevent swarming, increase colony count, or recover from losses. The “best” method really depends on your goal, timing, and what resources (bees, brood, queens) you have available.



What is a split?

1. One colony becomes two ...or more
2. We redistribute brood, bees, resources,
3. Have a plan for a new queen

Splitting a Beehive

Key Tips to Remember

1

You are dividing resources - not just bees and frames



2

Each half needs food (honey & pollen)

3

Each half needs a queen or resources to make one



4

Each half must have enough workers to care for brood, forage and defend the hive.

Why do we split?

- Prevent swarming
- Increase colonies
- Replace losses
- Manage genetics
- Sell/share nucs



Timing Matters

Best: early–mid spring

Drones are present

Less threat of cold weather

- Avoid:
 - Too early → poor mating
 - Too late → weak colonies before winter
- Watch for:
 - Crowding
 - Queen cells
 - Strong brood patterns

This is where experience + observation really comes in.

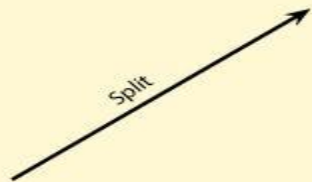
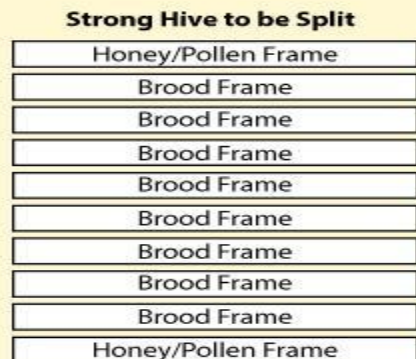


How to Split a Hive

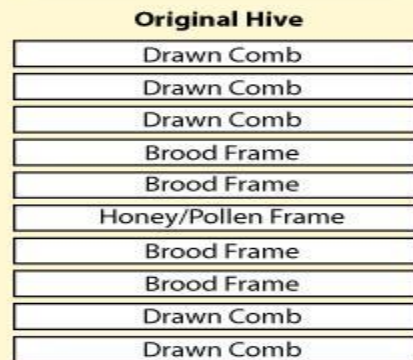
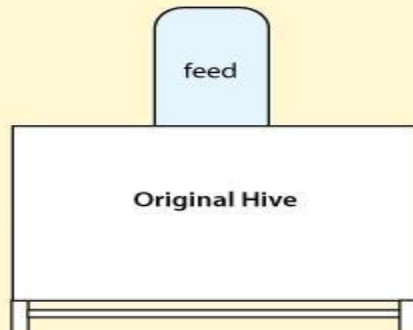


Note:

The amount of bees alone is not an indicator if a hive should be split. You want a strong hive with plenty of bees and lots of brood so the splits are able thrive after splitting. The queen needs to be introduced to the new split hive.



Five frames stay in hive and five drawn out are added to fill in missing frames.



Overview

Walk-Away Split

1. Split hive into two equal parts
2. One side keeps queen
3. Other side raises new queen



Pros & Cons

Walk-Away Split

- ✓ Simple, beginner-friendly
- ✓ No need to buy queens
- ✗ Brood break slows growth
- ✗ Queen quality variable

👉 Who likes letting the bees do the work?



Overview

Queen-Right Split

1. Split hive
2. Know where queen is
3. Introduce mated queen to split
4. Immediate egg-laying



Pros & Cons

Queen-Right Split

- ✓ Fast buildup
- ✓ Controlled genetics
- ✗ Costs money
- ✗ Queen acceptance risk
- 👉 Anyone here regularly buy queens?



Overview

Nuc Split

1. Small split (3–5 frames)
2. Placed in nuc box
3. Mini colony

👉 You're essentially building/pulling a nuc from an established colony.



Pros & Cons

Nuc Split

- ✓ Less impact on main hive
- ✓ Great for selling/sharing
- ✗ Slower growth than full split
- ✗ Needs monitoring
- 👉 Who's bought or sold nucs before?



Overview

Artificial Swarm

1. Move the queen + some brood + some frames/bees to a new box
2. Leave most brood + queen cells behind
3. Mimics natural swarm



Pros & Cons

Artificial Swarm

- ✓ Excellent swarm control
- ✓ Keeps bees from leaving
- ✗ Requires timing
- ✗ Can impact honey

- 👉 A common method for me in spring!



Overview

Queen Cell Splits

1. Use existing queen cells
2. Divide into multiple splits
3. Each gets a queen cell



Pros & Cons

Queen Cell Splits

✓ Efficient—can make many splits

✓ Cells are free to cheap

✗ Timing more critical

✗ Risk of cell or mating failure

👉 Who trusts swarm cells?



Overview

Cut-Down Split

1. Remove all/most brood into new split, intro new cell or queen
2. Leave foragers with little to no brood behind in original hive
3. Original hive doesn't have larva to feed, so focus switches to nectar collection/storage



Pros & Cons

Cut-Down Split

✓ Boosts honey production

✓ Controls swarming

✗ More complex

✗ Requires strong hive

👉 This is for those seeking honey yields



What Method to Choose

Think about your goal:

- Prevent swarming?
 - Artificial swarm or walk-away split
- Increase hive count cheaply?
 - Walk-away or queen cell splits
- Build strong colonies fast?
 - Queen-right split
- Minimize impact on honey production?
 - Nuc split or cut-down split
- Do you raise your own queens?
 - Queen cell splits

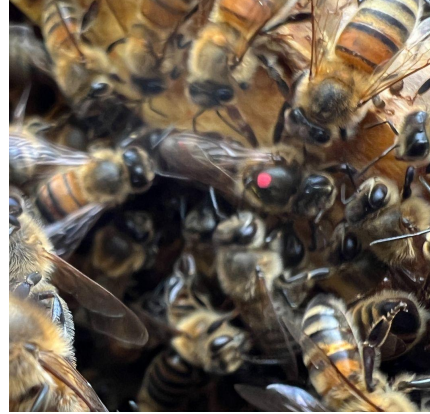


No matter the type or split

- 2+ frames of capped brood
- Enough bees to cover the brood
Nurse bees (not just foragers)
- Food stores (honey/nectar + some pollen)
- A queen or a plan for one (existing, introduced, or queen cell)
- A clear follow-up plan (check for queen, eggs, strength in ~7 days)

Common Mistakes

- Too early splits
- Weak resource balance
- Not checking queen status



What NOT to do

- ✗ Splitting weak or aggressive hives
- ✗ Propagating poor performers
- ✗ Ignoring temperament (your neighbors will care)
- 👍 Every split is a vote for the kind of bees you want in your apiary.



Discussion

- Questions
- What's worked?
- What didn't work?
- Plans this season?



More SIBA Resources

Facebook Discussion Group:

www.facebook.com/groups/morganranch

Instagram:

www.instagram.com/siba_indianahoney

Website:

www.indianahoney.org