

Specific Colony Split Methods

Selecting a Split Method: One of the more daunting aspects of colony splits is deciding which of the seemingly limitless methods to use. To start, we have picked some of the more basic approaches, as these provide a useful reference. With each method, we start with an overview to help the beekeeper decide which to use. This is in no way an exhaustive list of methods, and we will include some of the more complex splits a later part of this tutorial.

We depict all the splits with 10-frame hive boxes, but they apply equally well to nucleus hive boxes or to longhives. In fact, we split colonies into nucleus hive boxes, full size boxes, and into longhives.

Once you have reviewed the various split methods outlined in this guide, you will need to pick one. Whatever method you pick, you might be forced to change it in favor of a different method once you actually open the hive. This is quite normal; it is far better to adapt to what you see in the hive rather than charging ahead with a plan that will ultimately fail.

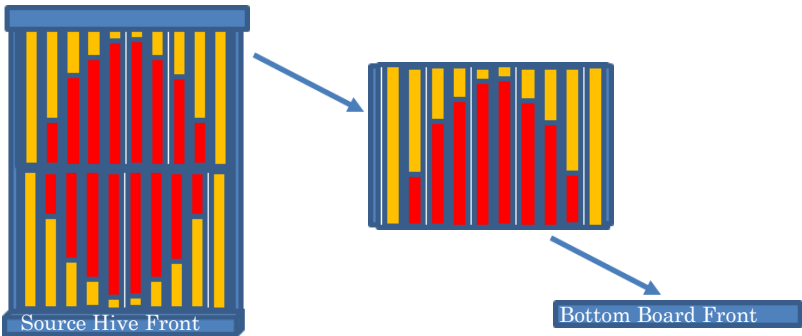
Rebalancing your Apiary: It is helpful to do a pre-check of the hives in your bee yard before embarking on your splits. You need to know what resources you have available in your bee yard. In fact, it helps to think of colony splits as a rebalancing of the resources in your apiary, which means you need to know what is the best course for the whole beeyard, not just one hive.

For example, you might find that one of the hives you were going to split is actually too weak and needs some brood from another hive. It helps greatly to know in advance which hive you can steal from so you can complete the job rather than coming back later to disturb the hive a second time.

Walk-Away Split (Blind Split)

Overview: The Walk-Away Split is as simple as it gets. In its simplest form, you select a really strong hive with brood in both brood boxes, and transfer its top brood box onto an adjacent bottom board, close it up, and hope for the best. You don't bother looking for the queen, and you don't pull frames. It does assume that both boxes have plenty of eggs and young larvae so that the queenless side can develop one or more of them into an emergency queen. This method is a good option if you are in a hurry, or are not good at finding the queen. You can improve this method by diligently performing Step 2 below.

Step 1: Transfer the top box of the source hive onto an adjacent bottom board, and add a lid to it. Reverse the source hive's remaining lower box and bottom board. (This causes some source-hive foragers to return to the split hive, thereby replenishing the destination hive foragers that drifted back to the source hive.)



Step 2: One hive becomes queenless until it raises a new queen, but we don't know which hive. Return in about a week and look for signs of a queen in each hive. One should have a laying queen, and the other hive one or more queen cells (supersedure, emergency, or swarm cells). If the queenless hive has no signs of queen cells, buy a queen or install a queen cell from another hive.



Classic Split

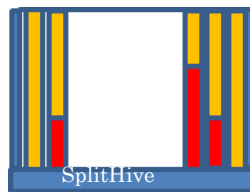
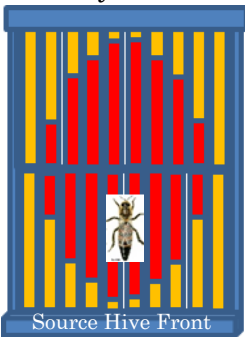


Overview: This is one of the most commonly performed splits. Commercial beekeepers do countless thousands of these splits after the almond pollination in California. It is a little more complex and time consuming than the walk-away split described on the previous page, but in our experience the outcome is more predictable.

In this split, the queen is found and kept with the source hive, then typically 3 frames of brood and 1 or 2 frames of food are transferred from the source hive to the split hive. Then a (typically purchased) queen or queen cell is installed in the new hive.

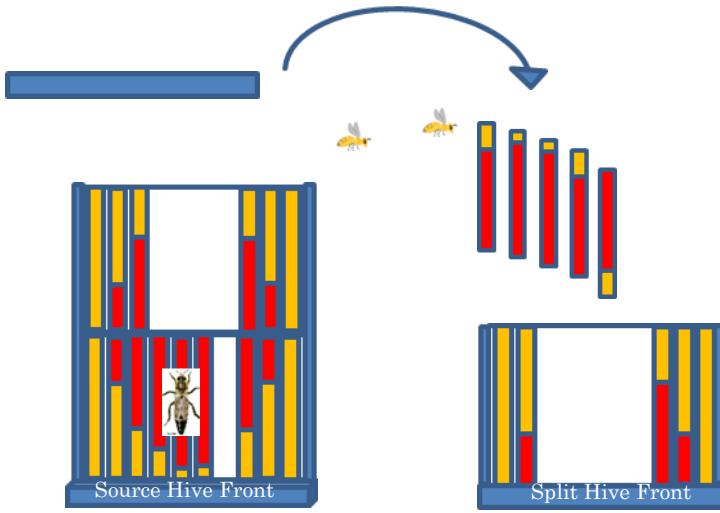
Alternatively, if you really like the genetics of the source hive, then let it raise its own queen. In this case, make sure the transferred brood frames have plenty of eggs or young larvae from which the colony can raise a queen.

Step 1: Prepare the split: (a) Select a strong colony as your source hive. (b) Set up a new hive (bottom board, hive box, five empty frames, and lid) adjacent to the source hive to receive the split colony. (c) Find the queen and isolate her or keep her in the lower box with a queen excluder so you don't accidentally transfer her to the new split hive.



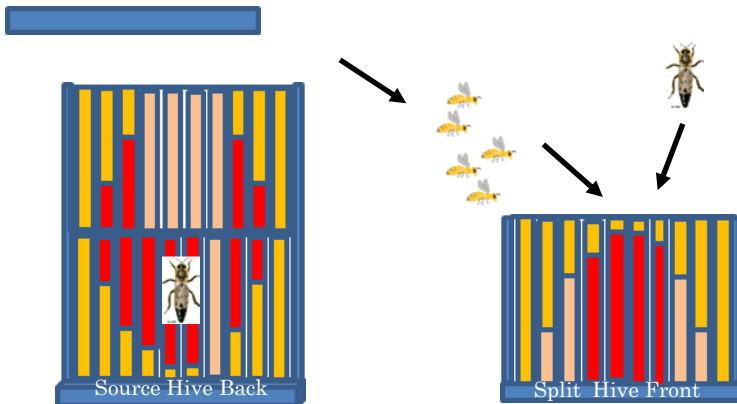
Step 2: Transfer up to 3 frames of brood and 2 frames of food from the source hive into the adjacent split hive. Install some food (syrup and pollen patty) in the new hive, and close the lid. Reverse the source hive to balance forager drifting. (This causes foragers from the source hive to return to the split hive instead of the source hive, thereby replenishing the split hive foragers that return to the source hive.)

Classic Split



Step 3: Backfill the empty frame slots of the source hive with empty frames (preferably drawn frames) and close it up.

Allow one day after **Step 2** for the queen's pheromone to dissipate in the split hive. Then install your purchased queen. Return in a week to 10 days* and look for eggs and larvae in the split hive. (If you don't want to buy a queen, you can let the new hive raise its own queen, but make sure there are plenty of eggs and young larvae in the transferred comb.)



* Inspecting a hive with a newly installed queen can sometimes cause colony rejection of the queen. Many beekeepers wait 10 days, but you should wait at least a week.