

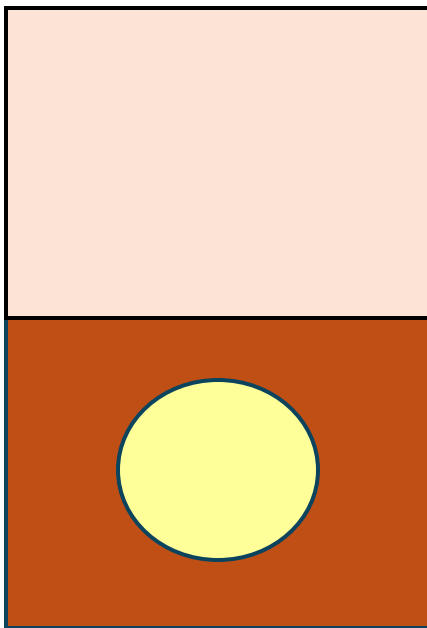
# Honey bee colony swarm management in Michigan

Meghan Milbrath, 2026

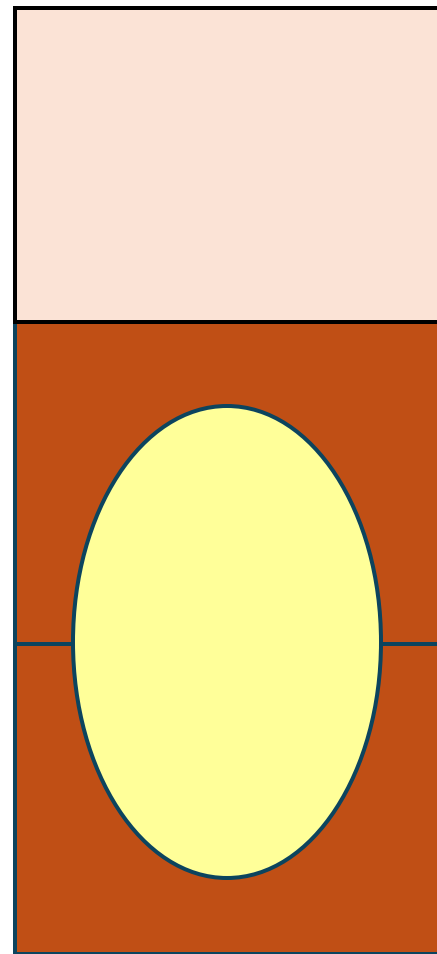
## **Optional Step 1: Give bees room for incoming nectar above the brood nest.**

I do this in early spring, when I see bees flying and pollen coming in, but I know it will get cold again after (e.g., in Jackson county, I usually do this around April 15<sup>th</sup>). It buys me about an extra week before splitting, and it also gets the bees cleaning out the comb. If you don't have drawn comb, then

don't worry about this step, and if you are still feeding, you would not do this (keep feeding).



For small colonies, that are entirely in the top box, remove the bottom box (to cull and clean frames), and add a box of drawn comb on top.



For big colonies (>10 frames of bees) - Add an empty box of drawn comb on top.



## Step 2: Make Splits

Make splits when most or all colonies are show that they are ready:

- 1) You see backfilling of nectar in the brood nest.
- 2) You see full frames of brood.



*Photo by John Klapperich*

This photo shows backfilling – where the bees are adding filling cells in the broodnest with nectar before the queen can re-lay them with eggs.



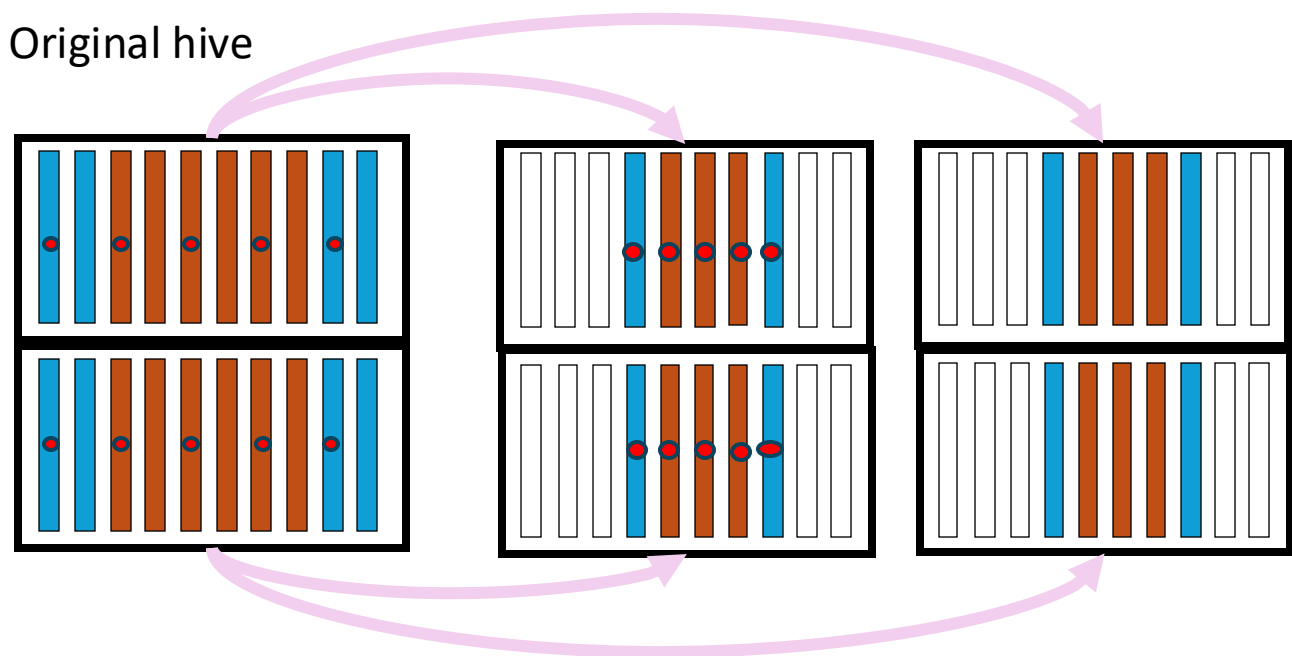
*Photo by Richardoyouk,  
<https://flic.kr/p/54qQfm> CC BY NC ND 2.0*

This frame has capped brood all the way to the edges, indicating that they will soon have lots of new bees emerging, and it is ready to be split.



## Split option 1: Easiest split ever

This is a perfectly fine way to split a colony for swarm prevention. It is similar to a 'walk away' split but ensures the resulting hives will be more even. Mark every other frame in the original hive. Move all the marked frames to a new hive set up and leave the unmarked frames in the original boxes, keeping them in their original orientation. Push to the middle of the boxes, and fill in the outer frames with empty comb or whatever you have.



Check back in 4 days. One hive will have eggs, and you will know that this hive has the original queen. Add a mated queen or queen cell to the other hive (or allow it to raise its own queen).



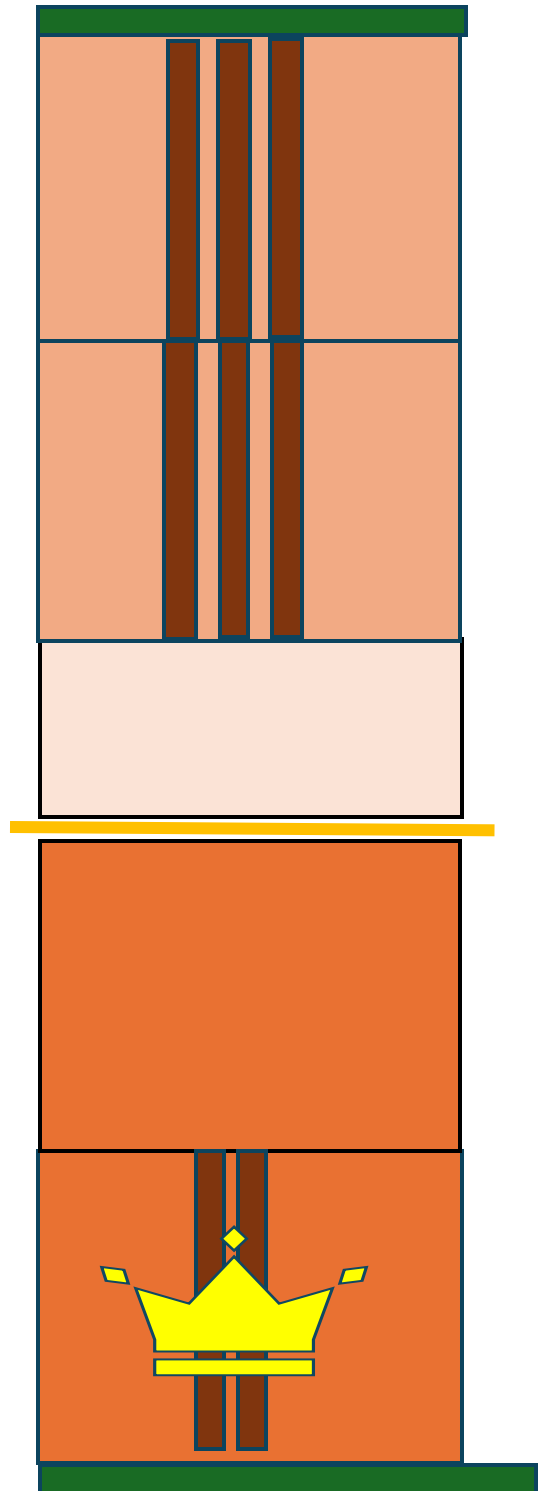
## Split option 2: Meghan's favorite way to split colonies in Michigan

This is the system that has worked well for me in the last few years.

### Day 1: Nice weather

- 1) Set up an empty box in the location of the original hive. Put about 2 frames of brood in the middle, a frame of honey on either end, and fill with empty drawn comb.
- 2) Add a second deep box on top, with mostly drawn comb (can have honey frames on the outside).
- 3) Make sure the queen goes in these bottom two boxes. If you see her, you can move her down, or you can just shake /brush all the bees back into these boxes.
- 4) Add a queen excluder and a honey super and restack the brood boxes at the very top.

*The hive shown here had eight frames of brood. Two will stay in the original hive with the queen, and the rest are split between two boxes up top, making two small splits. If there were fewer brood frames, or you wanted a larger split, you could use only one box on top.*



## Split option 2: Meghan's favorite way to split colonies in Michigan

**Day 2: Can be done in any weather;** just has to be done before emergency queens will emerge.

- 1) Remove the top boxes with brood, giving them a lid and bottom board.
- 2) Give each split a queen cell or mated queen, or allow emergency cells to emerge.

The hive with the original queen is ready to go in the original location.

