



# Southern Spring

Privet

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## It's Already Time To Go!

By now most of the U.S. should be experiencing some sort of nectar flow. Bees should be scurrying about rewarding us with the riches of nature. Our lazy days inside, sipping on hot toddies in front of the fire, are long gone. Now is the time we shed that extra weight and feel our superman strength return as we begin lifting those 100 pound supers. Backs beware, spring time is here!

Before we jump into what's blooming, let me reiterate once more about starvation. Last month I talked about lifting colonies from the rear in order to check honey stores if

cold temperatures restricted opening them. However, I recently remembered something from my beginning beekeeping years that I want to pass along. It was early Spring and I was out on a cold morning lifting colonies to determine if they were in need of food. All the colonies felt heavy plus the nectar flow was just around the corner; I was confident they would be fine. A week later I noticed numerous dead bees scattered out in front of one colony. I opened the colony only to find a box full of dead bees, and I do mean packed to the top. Plus, every frame had a single bee tucked head first into each cell but not a drop of honey to be found. The weight I was

feeling was not the honey stores but the weight of the bees themselves. The colony started rearing brood earlier than usual, hence the colony population exploded, consuming all stores before the nectar flow arrived. Just be aware of this so you don't make the same mistake. With all the other problems facing us, starvation should be the last thing to kill our colonies. If you are concerned your colony doesn't have enough stores, just feed them.

So far this year, the season seems to be three to four weeks ahead of schedule. Hopefully during the wintery months you built and repaired your equipment and are now ready for the flow. Here in the piedmont region of Georgia the red maple, blueberry, henbit and redbud

blossoms are on the decline. These blooms provide more pollen than nectar, which kick start colonies into heavy brood rearing. Any day now we are





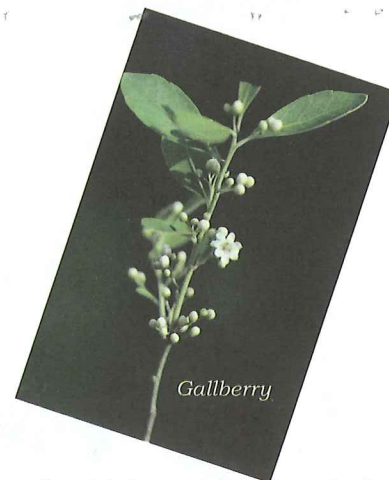
anticipating a strong nectar flow with blackberry (bramble), tulip poplar, privet, and clover. Years past, our Spring nectar flows easily produced two to three supers per colony. The only problem being, it's our only nectar flow. We may see a trickle of gold-rod in early Autumn but we can never rely on it. Therefore, our bees must collect all the honey needed for our table as well as theirs in roughly four to six weeks. This honey is usually light amber with a fruity flavor. It does tend to crystallize quickly due to its high glucose content but is still a crowd pleaser.

So, when should I super, you ask? The time is now. How should I super, you say? That's a good question and still under considerable debate. There are several ways, depending on which beekeeper you talk to. You have bottom- versus top-, all at once versus "as needed" basis. To keep confusion to a minimum let me state how we do things here at the lab. We try to super colonies as they need it. When a super is about half full, we add another. However, apiaries too far away to check on a weekly basis are supered two to three at a time per colony. I'd rather give them too much space than not enough. Crowded conditions during a nectar flow will force bees to fill up the brood nest with honey restricting the queen, triggering swarming. However, with the addition of our latest pest, the small hive beetle, one must be careful. Additional room allows space for the beetles to hide. They can't rear young in empty supers if there's no food available, but they can congregate there. If you are in an area prone to beetle troubles, you may want to be careful about giving your bees too much space. And don't put old nasty supers with dark comb on your colonies. Get rid of that old junk! If you don't know how old a frame is, then it is probably too old and needs to be removed. A steady Spring nectar flow is the best time for bees to construct new comb. Here at the lab we have disposed of hundreds of old frames: too many to count. We also decided not to melt the wax from these old combs. Who knows what contaminants may be lingering in the wax? A good yearly practice is to replace two frames each year in the brood chamber, marking them with the year. Therefore, none of your frames is ever over five years old.

By April our southern cohorts have already begun supering for the Tupelo flow. The Tupelo Gum tree produces large amounts of nectar in a few short weeks. The nectar output is so strong the bees go "honey crazy." Honey produced from Tupelo is considered a delicacy because of its light, amber color and exquisite flavor. Due to its low glucose concentration it doesn't crystallize as quickly as other light colored honeys, thereby making it a desirable honey, especially for northern markets. However, production of Tupelo on a commercial scale is not easy. It takes experienced beekeeping skills and a keen knowledge of regional nectar flows. There are numerous challenges facing Tupelo producers. Here are just a few: First, Tupelo locations are difficult to find and traverse since most are situated in swampy, river areas. Some beekeepers keep their colonies on barges and float them up and down the river in search of the Tupelo trees. Just prior to the nectar flow, all honey stores must be removed to insure only pure Tupelo nectar is being placed in the cells. And finally, supers must be removed before other floral sources bloom in order for the Tupelo honey not to be contaminated. Because of the difficulty producing Tupelo and its desirability, it can bring top dollar at the market. However, don't plan on heading south any time soon in search of your very own, private patch of Tupelo. These prized locations are fiercely guarded and passed down from generation to generation.

The coastal regions of Georgia will soon be gearing up for the Gallberry flow, one of the largest flows in the country. Gallberry is another light, amber honey which tends not to granulate. It is produced from an evergreen shrub in the sandy soil along the coast. It is a major honey crop for beekeepers from coastal Texas to Virginia.

Each year, swarm management and prevention seems to come earlier due to our mild, and warmer Winters. Normally strong colonies in the Piedmont regions of Georgia are swarming the first of April with the peak of the season hitting in May. This year swarms are a full month early. Our stronger colonies were producing drones as early as January. If there ever was a time to expand your operation, this is it. Colonies are loaded



early with bees. Dividing colonies or making splits is best done just prior to a strong nectar flow, which is now. Hopefully, you anticipated how many splits you would be making last year and ordered the proper number of queens. If there are no queens available, and your hives are busting at the seams, why not raise your own queens? However, realize, you will not have emerging brood from this new colony for at least 44 days. The queen has to complete her development (16 days), orientate (three to five days), make her mating flights (two to four days), commence egg laying (two to three days) and then it's still 21 days before the first round of brood will emerge. But at least you have a new colony with your very own queen. We will explore the actual rearing process in the next issue.

An additional thought. As a beekeeper and a researcher I live with a notebook strapped to my side. Every yard is named, every colony is numbered and even sides of frames may be labeled. Taking notes has become a habit and one I recommend to all beekeepers. It helps you keep track of your colonies' needs, problems or successes. After working several colonies, one tends to forget which colony needed the new queen and which one was out of food. All those white boxes begin to look the same. But if you have your trusted notebook by your side, you can quickly jot down any problems you encounter. Another reason to take notes is you'll be amazed at how much you learn about your bees. For instance, as your colonies are coming out of the Winter and your assessing their condition, why are some weaker or stronger than others? Why did one die and not the next one? If you took notes during your Fall preparation, the answers may be there.

Have a grand Spring! See ya'll! **BC**