



Why Do Honeybees Swarm?

By Debbie Ford, Master Gardener Intern 2021

Swarming is the honeybee colony's approach to reproduction. It is the colony rather than the individual bee which reproduces itself.

When the existing hive becomes full and there is no more room for the queen to lay eggs they prepare to swarm. The existing Queen and between a third and a half of the colony will leave the hive in a great buzzing black cloud. When they leave, they don't know where they are going only that it is time to depart from the hive. Usually, they will quickly settle in a tight cluster within 100 meters of their original hive.



They will rest on tree branches or bushes, but in urban areas they can cluster on buildings, cars, lamp posts and statues. The swarm will cluster tightly around the queen to protect her. The swarm is usually very calm at this stage since each bee has filled their stomachs with honey before leaving the hive. Their only concerns are to protect the queen and find a new home to live in.

Scout bees are sent out to find a new home for the colony. This can take anywhere from a few hours to days for them to find a new home. Once the colony decides where their new home will be, they fly as a group to the new location to settle in. The colony will then get to work building new wax comb to store nectar and pollen and for the queen to lay eggs in.

Back at the original hive the colony of bees will be waiting for a new queen to emerge from her cell and to go on her mating flight. A few days after her mating flight she will begin to lay eggs to keep the original colony alive and thriving.

There are now 2 colonies, each with a queen, to build up the honeybee population.

If you should come across a swarm or find a colony of bees that have made their hive in a structure, please call a qualified beekeeper to collect the bees or remove them safely for you.



Swarm removal information:

https://beekeepersguild.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=149&Itemid=142
<https://tidewaterbeekeepers.net/swarms/>

Photo Credits:

<https://beekeepinginsider.com/will-bees-swarm-without-a-queen/>
<https://www.ripleys.com/weird-news/swarm-bees-follow-car/>
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