



**ATTA**

Atlantic Tech Transfer  
Team for Apiculture

## Managing a Nucleus Colony Part 1: What is a Nucleus Colony: Information for New Beekeepers

### BUYING A NUC

A 'nuc,' or a nucleus colony is merely a small, starter colony of honey bees. It is usually housed in a 3 to 5 frame box for easy management and transport. This is a collection of frames containing bees, brood, honey and open comb space, along with a laying queen. A nuc will develop to full-sized colony population and strength during the beekeeping season. Conventionally, once the nuc is obtained, the frames and bees will be transferred to a standard ten frame hive by the purchasing beekeeper. Buying from a local, reputable beekeeper is always preferable and supports the Atlantic beekeeping industry.

### NUC CONTENTS

A standard nuc should contain the following:

#### Honey bees:

- 3-5 frames worth of adult bees
- A laying queen
- At least 2 frames of brood

#### Food stores:

- 1 frame of honey
- Some stored pollen

#### Equipment:

- Frames in nuc (included in purchase)
- Nuc box (may have to return to seller)



Figure 1: Nuc box options from left to right: a wooden nuc box, a plastic nuc box and a cardboard nuc box (photo: countryfields.com)

Additionally, the nuc should contain empty drawn comb to allow ready space for the queen to lay. A five frame nuc may contain one frame of foundation to provide the colony space to work and grow.

### AVAILABILITY

Nucs are typically available from May to July in Atlantic Canada. Availability with some suppliers may be after blueberry pollination has concluded, meaning a later start in building up the new colony for the season. Good producers will have a first-come first-served style list to receive a nuc. Get your name on the list as early as possible!

### NUMBER OF FRAMES

One factor which impacts how a nuc will build-up to full colony size is the original quantity of bees and brood. Therefore, a larger nuc will potentially grow faster and provide a stronger colony at the end of the season. So, expect a strong five frame nuc to develop more quickly than a three framer. Also note, a 5-frame nuc may be more expensive. A minimum of two frames of brood with three frames well covered in bees should be expected.



### PARTNERSHIP WITH

Bleuets NB Blueberries  
New Brunswick Beekeepers Association Inc.  
Nova Scotia Beekeepers' Association

Wild Blueberry Producers' Association of Nova Scotia  
Prince Edward Island Wild Blueberry Growers Association  
PEI Beekeepers' Association

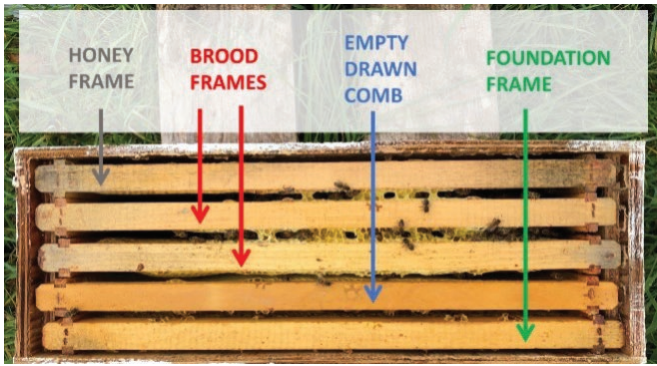


Figure 2: A typical five frame nuc showing frame content.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SUPPLIER

- Are you a registered beekeeper?
- Are you a member in good standing of your provincial beekeeping association?
- Do you have a current health report from the provincial inspector (Inspection Report)?
- How many (brood/honey/drawn comb/foundation) frames do you provide?
- When are your nucs available?
- What is the price including deposit on nuc box?
- What are the details of collection/delivery?
- Treatment details for pests and diseases?
- Age of queen? Is she marked?

### ALL NEW BEEKEEPERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO...

1. Participate in a credible beekeeping course and/or workshops,
2. Seek a mentor through your provincial beekeepers' associations, and
3. Become a member of your provincial association

### Visit our website for related information:

<https://www.perennia.ca/portfolio-items/honey-bees/>

Or contact us directly: [attna@perennia.ca](mailto:attna@perennia.ca)