

Open-Feeding Pollen Substitute

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Many years, we have a warm spell after the first frost and the bees can fly, but find nothing in the “field.” In the absence of nectar and pollen, our bees start foraging for alternative sources of carbs and protein. Bees pick up sand, sawdust, birdseed, or maybe even soda in some cans in a recycling bin on a neighbor’s back porch to bring home to the hive. Pretty soon the neighbor’s back porch is “abuzz” with activity, and it only takes one complaint to create a Bee Ordinance. So I open-feed “pollen substitute” in the fall after the flow shuts off. I don’t do this to provide protein to my hives (it does to some extent, but isn’t significant); I feed to give my bees something productive to do in my own yard. The point is to keep the bees busy and happy foraging at home, not at my neighbor’s house.

Simple Recipe:

4:1 Soybean Flour: Brewer’s Yeast

Deluxe Recipe:

3 cups Soybean Flour

1 1/2 cup Brewers Yeast

2 tsp sea salt

1 tsp Vitamin C powder

6 Tbsp dry milk powder

Sift the mixture together and put about 2 cups into the bucket every day while the bees are flying. As time goes on and the days get shorter and colder, it is normal for them to take less and less. If you like, feed commercial pollen substitute by sifting it to break up the clumps.

Strategy: cut-off two-thirds of the lid of a 5-gallon bucket; snap the remainder of the lid back onto the bucket. Put “pollen” into bucket; set out in yard on its side so the lid acts as a gate (so the bee’s wing action won’t blow the “pollen” out of the bucket).

The first day, bait the bucket with a drizzle of honey on the rim. The bees are attracted by the honey smell and then quickly clue in to the “pollen.” Do not open-feed sugar syrup, as the bees fight over syrup. I have never seen any conflict at my open pollen feeding stations. Place your stations a good distance from the hive, and somewhat protected — there will be a lot of activity.

Bring the buckets out in the morning and set them in the same spot every day. At night, bring them inside to prevent moisture buildup. In the morning, re-fill and set out again.