

Swarm Collecting Equipment

There is no definitive set of swarm collecting equipment. It comes down to personal choice, some people will only use a straw skep, another will swear by a home-made swarm collecting box.

I personally have a home made swarm box, and every swarm I attend, I imagine a new modification that will make it the ultimate tool! They are useful in that they are well ventilated, can be made bee proof, easy to carry/transport and can often accommodate frames if needed to be used as an emergency nuc.

So, to be able to catch swarms, what do I need and what will this kit cost me?

£5 will cover it!

Any of the purchases can be obtained at a cheap and cheerful shop – Proper Job et al

In addition to the usual kit and the swarm box, I usually keep the following in the car:-

Spare veils

Not really swarm catching kit, but ... I offer these to householders so they can watch and take photos without any fear. I usually wear a veil now while collecting. I do this as I believe that this serves two main purposes. It adds a little “danger” and so reduces the public’s perception that all bees at all times can be approached with impunity. It also reduces accidental stings which can be incidentally dangerous when working at heights etc. Having said that, I explain that a swarm is quite safe and that stings are only likely to occur due to crushing of trapped bees. Behind knees and crooks of elbows are common places to trap bees, so be aware when squatting down etc. as swarming bees will settle all over you.

Cardboard box

Free:

About 600x300x300, the bottom opened out so that it can be folded flat when stored in the car. Being light, it can be balanced above shrubs, held at a height etc. with ease. When reassembled ensure that all internal flaps are taped down so that the queen can not be trapped. The inside of the box should be bee-proof.

Packing/gaffer/duct/decorators tape

£1.50

Used to re-make the cardboard box, seal it shut, and 101 other things.

Remember not to present sticky side to the bees. A piece of tape on the reverse side will fix that.

Old Sheets/decorators sheet

Free, but may cause a fight!

Useful to shake swarms onto. Creates a 'clean' area that allows one to see the fallen bees and so not tread on them etc.

I prefer cotton or cotton/mix sheets as they are less 'woolly' than decorators sheets and the bees feet tend to stick less. Lighter load for the washing machine too. Pattern or colour is your choice! Local stones & sticks provide weights when it's windy.

String/cord

£1.50

You can't have enough string! Useful for swarms in high branches, a quick tug will detach a swarm

and bring in down into your upturned box (usually misses!) and your waiting sheeting. A 15/20M length of 6mm polypropylene is usually enough.

Length of Wood

Free:

Size is up to you but about 30mm across and 300mm long. Can be a bit of PSE or a stick, heavy is good.

One end of the cord is tied to this, and is used to toss the cord over a branch. Once over, the stick should be about 1M below the branch and the side running up to the branch is swung so it wraps around the 'stick end' a couple of times and gently pulled tight so that the branch can be tugged.

Catching it in a branch fork is even better. When finished, a few flicks will lower the stick end so it can be un-looped and allowed to fall to the ground. Saves ladders, climbing or reaching dangerously!

Beware of magnolias, they are slow growing and very brittle!

A tiny box

Free:

This should be very well ventilated and able to safely accept a queen. A partially open match box will do. Not only does she need to breathe, but the swarm need to know where she is! An old queen-cage works, but too fiddly! If the queen can be found, placing her in a container will assure you of catching the swarm; just pop it into your swarm box with the queen inside!

Water Sprayer

£1.50

This is an optional extra but quite useful. A small water sprayer with a fine mist. Useful for keeping a swarm in place with an occasional fine spray of water while you work out how to get at it; they don't like flying in the rain, and can also be useful on hot days if you can't offer a water feeder when the swarm is enclosed in a swarm box during transit etc.

Cutters

Luxury item:

Ratchet secateurs or long handled loppers make branch cutting easy – sawing is never a good idea. ALWAYS ask permission before hacking at someone's plants!