

# Raising Queen Cells with a Cloak Board

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Fig 1: A cloak board cell builder with board closed.

- Several days before grafting, setup a strong double deep colony from one or more colonies that has been previously treated for varroa mites and clear of nosema and other issues.
  - Reverse and close the entrance on the bottom board.
  - Find, mark, and place the queen in the bottom box. Make sure you have empty combs for her to lay in the bottom box.
  - Insert the cloak board in the open position with the entrance pointing in the direction that the lower entrance was formerly pointing in. The bees will orientate to the new, higher entrance.
  - Feed the colony before and throughout the period of raising queens.
  - Be sure and check for queen cells and destroy any. (I only do this in cell builders).
- 2 days before grafting: arrange the colony
  - The top box will need 1 frame of larvae and 1 frame of pollen in the top box along with honey and an empty comb or foundation for bees to store nectar. Capped brood can be included. Have the larvae and pollen frame towards the middle of the box as the grafts will be placed between these two frames. Having the larvae in this box will lure nurse bees up from the lower box into the position grafts will be placed.
  - The bottom box will need capped brood, some honey and pollen, and empty comb for the queen to lay in. A frame of larvae can be included, but not more than 1 frame.
  - Support colonies can be used to move frames to and from the cell builder if the right kinds of frames (capped brood, larvae, etc) are not available in the right proportions
  - Leaving only 2 frames of larvae in the entire colony will keep the larvae from out competing the grafts for the attention of the nurse bees.
  - Check all frames for queen cells and destroy any found.
- 1 day before grafting,
  - Close the cloak board by inserting the metal sheet
  - Open the rear entrance so the bees in the bottom box can get out
  - Returning foragers will return to the top box, using the new entrance where they trained to earlier, crowding the top box with well feed bees.
  - If there does not seem to be enough adult bees in the colony for this to work correctly, shake adult nurse bees from other colonies into the top box on this day with the board closed. The colony needs to be boiling with bees to raise good queens.
- The day of grafting
  - Graft from a good colony placing the cells between the larvae and pollen frame. Recommendations say to remove the larvae frame at this time, but my experience

is that if grafting only about 30 queens, this step is not necessary in a good cell builder. If raising more queens per graft, you should remove the larvae frame.

- 1 day After grafting,
  - remove the cloak board
  - close the rear entrance
- 5 days After grafting
  - I remove the capped queen cells to an incubator. (these will later be put in a queen bank, see variation below)
  - Start again at '2 days before grafting' to setup to graft again. At this time, also be sure and check each frame for queen cells and destroy them. Eventually, you will miss one and end up with a virgin in the colony and it will no longer be usable as a cell builder, or you will injure the queen disrupting the colony so much, however you should be able to use it several times (a number of months) until that happens.



fig. 2 Queen cells from a cloak board colony      fig 3. Virgin queens emerging in cloak board queen bank

### **Queen Bank Cloak Board Variation:**

A cloak board colony can also be used as a queen bank. To convert the same cell builder colony into a queen bank do these steps.

- Around day 5-7 after grafting. Check for capped cells on bar. Check brood frames for queen cells and remove. Do any necessary maintenance on bottom box. Place a frame of capped brood on each side of the grafts. This will encourage bees to keep this area with the cells warm
- Day 10 after grafting. Removing queen cells from bar and cage similar to fig. 3. Each cage should have some queen candy. Place back between capped brood frames. Close cloak board to make top queenless.
- Day 11 – 12. Check for emerged queens. Remove empty cells as queens can crawl back in and get stuck. Introduce to 24hr old queenless nucs within 4 days after emergence as caged queens with attendants. Use queen candy to slow release, check 3 days after introduction for release. Check nucs in 2 weeks after introduction for a laying queen.