

Using and Trialing the Bee Gym

Where to place the Gym.

It is important to get the Bee Gym into a busy part of the beehive. Placing the Bee Gym on top of the brood frames in a shallow 'eke' (upward hive extension) 10 – 12mm deep has been successful in 2018. It is also possible to turn over a framed queen excluder and place the Bee Gyms on top, (Under the queen excluder if your boxes are Top Bee Space).

With full size colonies it might be advantageous to place 2 Bee Gyms above the brood frames. A single Bee Gym should be enough for a 5 or 6 frame nucleus hive.

When the bees form their winter cluster move the Bee Gyms so that they are above the main concentration of bees. In spring, clean the Bee Gyms and move them close to the new developing brood.

Beekeepers have also had good results placing Bee Gyms on the mesh floor of the hive, near to the entrance.

Before inserting the Bee Gym check that the loops are tight and that the 10 'flippers' are located in their sockets. The 'wires' and small plastic flippers point upwards. Please be aware that the Bee Gym uses bee-sized engineering, this means that the parts are delicate.

To clean the Bee Gym I would suggest soaking in a bucket of washing soda solution, if the bees have filled the gaps in the 'flippers' soak then clear with a cocktail stick. If the Bee Gym is reintroduced after a clean up, it seems to boost the mite fall again. Open mesh floors are more effective if the inspection board is left out, unless actively monitoring mite fall. A large build up of debris on the board encourages wax moths and may allow Varroa mites to climb back into the hive.

Trialing the Bee Gym

Our previous tests have produced very positive results. In most hives the introduction of Bee Gyms greatly boosts the amount of mites coming through onto the sticky boards a few days after they are added. Results from 2018 suggest it takes two to three months to bring down the overall Varroa mite population.

In order to study this effect it is necessary to ascertain the 'natural' mite fall in the hive prior to the Bee Gyms being introduced. To do this, monitor the hives for one or two weeks before putting the Bee Gyms in. These counts could be every day, every few days or weekly, as long as it is possible to see the mites amongst the debris on the board. Once the Bee Gym is added there seems to be a particularly active period for about three months. Many of the mites coming through will be alive, so it is necessary to have something sticky like a thin layer of Vaseline on the board, to keep them in place.

If you don't have time to do all these mite counts, it is still possible to monitor the progress of the Bee Gyms as long as you count the mite drop in your hive before and after introduction of the Bee Gym, with occasional counts when you do have the time.

Another idea is to repeat the trial devised by Richard Ball from Devon Apicultural Research Group, which can be found on the home page of their website: www.dargbees.org.uk

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