

Newfoundland & Labrador Beekeeping Association

429 Windgap Road, Flatrock, NL, A1K 1C4
www.nlbeekeeping.ca

Are you buying nucs this spring?

Be aware of what to expect¹

A 'nuc', or nucleus colony of bees is a small starter hive typically 4 or 5 frames that is used to initiate a honey bee colony. A nuc is the most common way for small-scale and commercial beekeepers to purchase a honey bee colony in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL).

PLEASE NOTE: It is illegal to import bees into the province without a permit from the provincial government!!!! This is to keep NL free of varroa mites and otherwise maintain the relatively good health of our honey bee stock.

A nuc generally consists of a queen, 2 or more frames of brood, a frame of feed (honey stores), and a frame of foundation (with or without drawn comb) that gives the bees space to cluster. A nuc can vary in the total number of frames (brood, feed and empty or drawn foundation), the age of the queen, the number of bees included in the nuc, and the type of shipping box. However, NL nucs are most often sold with 4 frames in an enclosed, easily transportable, waxed cardboard nuc box.

The NLBKA's standard for a 4 frame nuc is as follows:

- **Queen bee**
- **2 frames of brood, ½ to ⅔ capped, with adhering bees**
- **1 frame of feed (honey stores) with adhering bees**
- **1 frame of foundation/empty comb**
- **Extra bees to ensure the brood will be kept warm**
- **Frames are standard deep Langstroth frames (9 1/8") with comb drawn on foundation**

Established NL nuc producers adhere to this definition of a nuc but there may be some variation as the number of vendors increases. So ask questions! **Know what you should expect.**

1. Are the brood frames capped?

Two frames of mostly capped brood, versus two frames of eggs and larvae will make a huge difference to how fast your nuc takes off. A good nuc, when made up by the producer with approximately ½ to ⅔ of the brood capped, may produce surplus honey in an average year if it is established on drawn comb. If you are establishing the nuc in a hive with undrawn foundation, you cannot expect surplus the first year. Your focus will be on drawing comb ASAP and maximizing honey stores in preparation for winter.



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2. How old is the queen? Is the queen marked? What are the origins of the stock?

A nuc will usually have a queen mated in June or early July (the year of nuc purchase), and may be boosted with brood from other hives. Ask your nuc and queen producer whether they have a formal breeding program established (what breeding decisions do they make?). You have a right to ask the producer about the origins of their stock, for example, about the lineage of their queens.

The International Queen Colour Code is:

WHITE for years ending in 1 or 6
YELLOW for years ending in 2 or 7
RED for years ending in 3 or 8
GREEN for years ending in 4 or 9
BLUE for years ending in 5 or 0

Many nuc producers will mark their queens with the colour of the year, in order to date the queen and allow for easy queen identification during colony inspections. You can ask to have your queen marked, but you may be charged a small additional amount for this service on top of the nuc purchase price.

3. Has the apiary been tested for pests, pathogens and diseases?

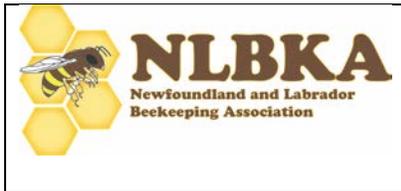
While NL is currently free of varroa mites and several other pests and pathogens that plague beekeepers elsewhere in North America, we do have some pathogens such as *Nosema* that can cause serious health problems for honey bee colonies. You have a right to ask the nuc and queen producer if their bees have been inspected for pests, pathogens and diseases by a government inspector. You can ask when they were last inspected, about the traffic between their apiaries and other apiaries in the province, and about whether they have had to treat for any disease. Also, you can ask for a copy of their most recent inspection/testing results.

NOTE: Vendors of honey bees are an important, potential pathway by which varroa mites and other pests may be transmitted around NL, so it's important that you obtain your bees **ONLY** from beekeepers whose apiaries have been inspected by a government inspector. **NOTE:** by law, all beekeepers must report infections or infestations of American foulbrood, European foulbrood, *Nosema*, tracheal mite, varroa mite, and greater wax moth to the provincial apiarist, Karen Kennedy.

Summary check list

Here's a list of questions you may want to ask your producer to be clear on what you will be getting:

- What is the cost of the nuc?
- Is the nuc box included in the price?
- What type of nuc box is it? (cardboard, plastic or wood)
- Does the queen come marked? If not, will the producer mark the queen, and will this cost extra?
- How many frames are in the nuc and what size (e.g., standard Langstroth deep frame, 9 1/8")
- How many frames are covered in bees?
- How many frames contain brood?
- Is the brood of all stages?



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- What % of the frames of brood are covered in brood?
- What age is the queen?
- When will the nuc be available for pick-up?

We advise you to make inquiries and orders early (previous fall to the first days of January of the year you need them). This helps ensure you are getting nucs from the producer you desire and you are getting the dates you want them. You may be asked for a deposit to hold your order.

NOTE: All first time beekeepers are encouraged to take a hands-on workshop before jumping into beekeeping. Check out the NLBKA website for more information about training workshops.

PLEASE NOTE: The number of nucs available and the timing of their availability may vary from one year to the next depending on various factors such as the producer's winter losses, and weather conditions during the spring mating period. You may not get all the nucs you want in a given year because producers may want to provide at least one nuc to as many customers as possible. **Please be patient, and never, ever obtain bees from out-of-province!**

ⁱ This document is inspired by information sheets prepared by the B.C. Bee Breeders Association (<http://bchoneyproducers.ca/info-for-beekeepers/bc-beebreeders/questions-for-nuc-suppliers/>) and the Ontario Bee Breeders' Association (https://www.ontariobee.com/sites/ontariobee.com/files/document/Nuc%20Buyers%20Guide%202013_0.pdf)