

# Honeybee Swarm FAQ

Original source for this information was Daniel Weston from Blue Green Horizons  
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## What are you seeing?

Honeybees leave their hive in mass for two reasons: *Reproductive Swarms* and *Absconding*.

During their flight they form a large protective cloud around the Queen to protect her from predators. They wish to avoid you at all costs. Once clear of the old hive they will settle on some object to rest, often tree branches.

## Reproductive Swarms

Swarming is the natural reproduction of a honeybee colony. It is a normal phenomenon, and rarely poses a danger to people or animals. When honeybees have good weather and plenty of food, their populations can increase dramatically filling the hive. When things are just right the established Queen leaves with about half of the workers to find a new home.

For organizational reasons they need to stop and rest – with the Queen calling the workers to cluster around her. These clusters can be the size of a soccer ball or as large as a beach-ball. The swarming action and the cluster are designed to protect the Queen. While the Queen is protected & resting some of the Workers fly throughout the area looking for a new Home. This home could be in a tree, an old shed or if they find an entrance into the wall of a house. The Bees may stay in the first clustered location for an hour or several days before moving to the final home. Sometimes they can't leave and start building comb on the branch.

## Absconding

If their home is damaged or infected with pests the Bees escape and try to find a safe location. However, as the Queen may not be in shape to fly very far these clusters are often found on walls, the ground or near the ground. While some of these are large they are often small – the size of a baseball.

Absconding's can happen any time but are most common after storms or in the late fall.

## What are we (Swarm Removal Service) doing?

Honeybee swarms are not highly dangerous under most circumstances. Swarming honeybees feed prior to swarming which reduces their ability to sting. Bees away from the vicinity of their nest (offspring and food stores) are also less defensive and are unlikely to sting unless provoked. We pay close attention to their behavior and wear the protective clothing required for each situation.

We work with the natural biology of the Honeybee to gather, calm and control them. We do this by directing or controlling the Queen – the rest will respond to the Queen presence. If you hear us Tanging (hitting a metal pot) it is because that “settles” a restless swarm of Bees.

We may use comb from a hive, a specially prepared bucket or box and sometimes a carefully designed vacuum to gather them. We may leave and come back in the evening to collect as many as possible. The few left behind will leave soon.



## Hazards of Bee Stings

Understand that some people may be moderately to severely allergic to bee stings. The reactions can vary from mild discomfort to a serious life-threatening medical condition. More severe reactions include generalized swelling and itching, faintness, sweating, a pounding headache, stomach cramps or vomiting, a feeling of impending doom, a tight chest or choking sensation with swelling of the throat and in extreme cases anaphylactic shock with death resulting. Seek medical care immediately if anyone has an allergic reaction to a bee sting.

## In an Emergency!

Only if a serious health threat is present because of the location of the swarm, such as in a highly traveled public area, should you attempt to do anything with a swarm. Only as a last resort in an emergency, you can spray a swarm of bees with very soapy water (up to 1 cup of liquid dish-washing detergent in a gallon of water) to kill the bees. Spraying a honeybee swarm is a risky operation because of the large number of bees and getting them all at once is very hard.

## **Is It Against the Law to Destroy A Honeybee Swarm?**

It is not illegal to destroy a swarm of honeybees, but it is not advisable. Many Pest Control Companies can't "treat" bees because of pesticide laws.

Trying to destroy a swarm can be dangerous, especially without the correct protective gear. More importantly, honeybees are beneficial pollinators that support agriculture and native plant communities.

## **The Bees Have Moved into A Building. Now, What Can Be Done?**

If bees have moved into a chimney, column, or wall space in a building, then they are no longer swarming and will remain to build a new colony. They will build wax combs, lay eggs, and store honey and pollen. Sealing the entrance or killing the colony will leave the bees and their hive materials inside the cavity to die, rot and smell which will attract rodents and pests.

The colony and its provisions must be completely removed before the entrance is sealed.

## **More Information on Swarms including Michigan Area Swarm Removal Services**

<https://kalamazoobeeclub.com/swarm-removal/>