



## PEST MANAGEMENT AND INSECT IDENTIFICATION SERIES

# Removing Bees from Walls

The process of removing honeybees from walls in a house is complex. Most people think they only have to spray and kill the bees. This would be effective if they were yellow jackets or hornets or even bumblebees. Honeybees, however, require a more demanding process. The other bees and wasps mentioned are primarily scavengers or produce very small amounts of honey. This is the major concern.

Honey is an acidic material, which, because of its thickness, prevents bacteria and fungi from growing in it. But, once the bees are killed, the honey, which is very hygroscopic (water loving), will extract moisture from the air and its surroundings. This will allow bacterial growth and the fermentation and souring of the honey. (Yes, this is the way to make mead, but it calls for careful manipulation of the water and temperature; otherwise you get a bubbling soupy mess that will explode within the honeycomb and run down and soak into the wood structure of the building.) Once soaked, the honey can rapidly decompose or break down the wood structure, leading to the potential for severe structural damage and an expensive repair bill.

To remove the bees properly, consult a qualified professional in beekeeping or carpentry. Once colonies enter a wall, they rapidly build an extensive wax comb to raise brood (young bees) and in which to store honey and pollen. In a short time, a colony can build enough honeycomb to span the open spaces between several wall studs and have it extend from the top of the wall to the floor with two or three layers of comb per section. This much storage can hold a considerable amount of honey.



Honeybee swarms initially enter walls through some small crack or opening. A fallen knot hole; a broken spot in the mortar; an opening around a light, faucet or electrical meter; or a gap between the brick and the siding on a house or building makes an excellent entrance site for a swarm of bees looking for a home. Once inside the wall, the bees quickly build comb for brood and food storage. In just a few days, the comb can be several inches long and the width of the studs. Initially the colony may go unnoticed, but once the colony numbers expand, bees are noticeable if they are in a traveled area.

Once bees are found, several steps need to be taken:

1. Try to determine the area infested by tapping on the inside wall and listening to the buzzing or

feeling the warmth of the wall. It should be several degrees warmer than the uninfested area.

2. Contact your local LSU AgCenter county agent for the name of a beekeeper who removes bees.
3. Call the beekeeper, and prepare to pay for the service. It is time consuming to get the bees removed properly.

To remove the bees properly, the beekeeper must open the wall to remove the entire colony. If the outside wall is brick, it will require opening the wall from the inside. The bees may be vacuumed up and put in a hive body, or sections of comb may be placed in frames and then placed in a hive. Occasionally bees will have to be destroyed to do the job correctly.

Once the bees are removed, the comb can be removed and, if unsprayed, the honey may be extracted for use or to feed other bees. After the comb is removed, wash the walls with either ammonia or bleach to remove the pheromones the bees have put on the wood and in the wax left in the wood. The removal of these pheromones reduces the potential for attracting the bees back to this wall. The wall is then replaced, and the hole the bees used to enter is closed. At this time it is wise to go completely around your home and check for any potential opening another swarm may use; if you find one, be sure to seal it.



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An additional problem is that bees in a wall may get inside the house through a light fixture, a wall outlet or a window. At night, the bees could be attracted to lights inside the house that are visible through these or other areas. This can be very annoying because they may trickle in just a few at a time and later enlarge the opening and come in, in larger numbers. This can be serious with small children or older people or for those who are allergic to bee stings.

Occasionally, when stored honey gets overheated in the wax, the wax cell melts and honey runs down the walls both on the inside between the walls and on the outside. This can create additional problems by attracting ants, wasps and other animals that eat honey.

