

After Tough Winter, Good Buzz So Far

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A colony can collapse if there's significant infestation. Options for dealing with mites run the gamut from doing nothing and hope the hive has strong genetics, to using an organic mite-away strip and beyond.

Vigo had been making his Bee Rancher rounds that day to one of the over 70 hives he manages, noting that the last hive he visited in Lafayette was "really cranking," describing the bees as very happy, in the sun all day, out of the wind, located on a hill, with lots of available pollen.

Next stop for Vigo was a Moraga hive with unusual origins. Wild bees created a hive in one of the large wooden columns that flanked the front door – rather like a vertical, stinging non-wel-

come mat. The homeowners wisely asked for help; the very large column was removed in sections and eventually the bees ended up in a bee box in their back yard. They seem to be thriving – Vigo carefully transferred their original waxy combs into frames that are now safely away from the front door.

Bees hanging out on your car, or in your chimney? Swarm season is right around the corner, typically starting in mid-March and running through mid-June. It's a natural phenomenon that occurs when the colony senses that there is no more room for the existing amount of bees. The colony will then produce a sister queen, and, just before she hatches, the existing queen will leave the hive with about half the colony in search of a new



home; this is how honey bees propagate.

"We try to manage the swarming process by splitting the hive into two colonies when we see a queen cup that has been formed and adding an additional hive box to the existing colony to give them more room," said Vigo.

Fear not, though a swarm of bees can be frightening, they are actually at their most docile state because

they don't have a home to defend and they have gorged themselves on honey. One might find a swarm of bees on a fence post, the bumper of a car, in a bush or on the branch of a tree; they will stay there until they find a new home.

Despite a tough winter, Vigo's business continues to prosper. He's currently taking orders for spring hives; for more information check the website at www.thebeeranchers.com or call (925) 519-0560.



Bee swarm removal

Photo provided

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