

Factsheet #1303

MARKING QUEENS

Colours

The international colour codes for marking honey bee queens are as follows:

For years ending in	0 or 5	=	Blue
	1 or 6	=	White / Grey
	2 or 7	=	Yellow
	3 or 8	=	Red
	4 or 9	=	Green

Purpose

Marking a queen may be advantageous for various reasons:

- a marked queen is readily identified;
- with the use of the international colour coding, the age of the queen will be known;
- marking queens with numbered disks and/or colour coding allows for identification of specific bee strains, lineage or other qualities.

Materials

For marking queens, one can use nail varnish or plastic/aluminium disks available in a queen marking kit. For the latter, a special non-toxic glue is provided and the disks are either numbered or blank.

Method

1. Manual: The queen can be marked by carefully placing the fingers on the sides of her thorax. Alternatively, the queen can be held by holding one of her hindlegs. When she is held securely, carefully apply the varnish or glued disk and wait until dry.

Note: Before marking your queen, try out the manual method on a few drones or worker bees.

2. Wire Cage: A small wire-mesh cage can be constructed where the sides are bent downward. After locating the queen, carefully place the wire cage over her and gently press down until she can no longer move. Carefully apply the varnish or the glued disk and wait for one minute or so to let the glue dry. Carefully raise the wire cage.

3. Marking Cage: Some beekeepers prefer the use of a marking cage comprised of a plastic tube closed off with a wire-mesh material on one side. The queen is allowed to walk into the tube and a plunger is used to force her up to the screen. A soft spongy material is often placed on the surface of the plunger. The queen should be held in place until the marking material is dry.

* Do not allow glue or varnish to run down the sides of the thorax or on other body parts of the queen. Keep a few Q-tips ready to mop up any spillage.