

One of the most important winter chores is to lift the hive body to check if it's light in weight. If so, it is low in honey stores. In the winter and early spring your bees will starve if they consume all of their honey reserves or they move to the edge of the hive where they no longer contact honey frames. If you have a light hive when the bees are too cold to fly, feed a solid source of pure carbohydrate in the form of fondant candy. It is very easy to apply on one of those 50 degree days where you can quickly lift the hive cover and place the candy directly on the frames or inner cover. Bees love fondant more than any other candy in winter months. It's soft and, if they decide to store it, they don't have to spend energy evaporating water from it. It's fun to make – just be sure you don't eat it before you get it to your hives!

BEE FONDANT

(Note: When doing this for the first time, **make small batches**. 4 cups sugar to 1 cup water is a good amount)

1 part water: 4 parts sugar

(by volume or weight - I find that it doesn't matter which, in this case).

1/4 teaspoon vinegar per cup of sugar

(if using 4 cups sugar, use 1 tsp vinegar)

Put in pan and heat and stir until it comes to a boil.

Don't let sugar burn! If it turns brown or dark tan, it will make the bees sick.

Boil for 3 minutes with cover on pan.

Boil uncovered until soft ball stage* (starts at 234 degrees F, ends at 243 degrees F)

Turn off heat and cool to 200 degrees F

Whip with a whisk until white (give it 5 – 10 minutes)

Pour onto waxed paper on cookie sheets

Cool undisturbed.

Cut up into squares, separate with waxed paper, store in plastic bag in freezer.

When feeding bees, warm fondant to room temp and put on top of frames or around hole in inner cover. Do not expose bees to cold for more than several seconds.

* The "soft ball" sugar stage is described in wonderful web site,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgRvA9Lk_N8

The different stages are compared at around 4:29 minutes on this video.

Another note:

Don't worry if you mess up and the fondant is too soft or too hard - the bees will appreciate it anyway!