

Smokers

Many old timers say that the smoker is a beekeeper's most important tool. That sounds about right. Here are a couple of tips.

Tip 1: Transporting a smoker in a car

This one is from our esteemed friend Mason Harris, member of the San Mateo beekeepers club and occasional speaker to our group. He posted this tip on BEE-L, the most popular on-line beeping discussion group:

"I see the thread on smokers and I thought I would add this. I learned after choking on smoke inside my van that, I could take my smoker and roll p the window on the bellows. The smoker would face outside the van and the pressure of the window would hold the smoker in place. I have an electric window. I suppose a hand roll up window would be the same. The little piece of material on the bottom of the bellows, between the wooden front and back of the bellows is where the window rolls up into. The rubber door/window gasket is the top pinch point between the top, wide part of the bellows. It is stable, you can drive from site to site with it outside the truck and the wind seems to keep the fuel lit." --

Mason

Tip 2: How not to burn down half of Northern California during the dry season

Summer is almost here, and with it comes the long months of no rain, high temperatures, and low humidity. This mix turns much of the state into a giant tinder box. Although this isn't a critical concern for those of us with hives in the city, we still need to take care that a spark from a smoker doesn't create a potentially dangerous fire. This is particularly true for those of us who have hives at the watershed. One way to avoid the problem is to not use a smoker at all.

Here are some alternatives:

- Use Liquid Smoke sold by the beekeeping supply companies.
- Work the bees only during the warmest parts of days when the field bees are away from the hive.
- Try spraying the bees with sugar water as you would smoke.

If you must use a smoker, try these tips:

- Light it with a long-nosed butane charcoal lighter to keep the flame at the bottom of the smoker.
- After the fuel begins to burn well, put damp, green grass in the top of the fire chamber of the smoker, above the fuel to prevent sparks.
- Keep an unlidded nuc box sitting next to the hive you're working so that you can set the burning smoker inside when you're not using it. That will prevent it from inadvertently being knocked over.