

What Is Bee Brood?

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Quick Answer

Bee brood means young, developing bees that have not yet become adults. It includes eggs, larvae, and pupae growing inside the cells of the honeycomb. Healthy brood in several stages shows that the colony is raising new bees.

Brood gives you useful clues about the queen and the future size of the colony. During an inspection, check the brood along with the hive food, space, pests, and equipment.

What Counts as Bee Brood?

Honey bees pass through three brood stages before they become adults:

- **Eggs:** The first stage, found at the bottom of open cells.
- **Larvae:** Small white grubs that grow in open cells while nurse bees feed them.
- **Pupae:** Developing bees hidden below wax caps until they are ready to emerge.

Adult workers, drones, and queens are not brood.

What Do Bee Eggs Look Like?

Honey bee eggs are white and about the size and shape of a tiny grain of rice. A queen normally lays one egg at the bottom of each cell. A new egg stands upright, then leans over before it hatches about three days later.

Eggs can be hard to see. Hold the frame with the sun or another bright light over your shoulder so the light reaches the bottom of the cells.

What Do Bee Larvae Look Like?

Healthy larvae are pearly white and have a wet or shiny look. A young larva looks like a tiny comma. As it grows, it curls into a larger C shape inside the open cell.

Larvae should not look brown, dry, melted, or twisted. If many larvae look unusual, ask a [county or state bee inspector](#) for help.

What Is Capped Brood?

Capped brood is developing brood sealed under a thin wax cover. Worker bees cap the cell after the larva has grown. Inside the cell, the larva changes into a pupa and then an adult bee.

Brood caps often form a tan or light-brown patch across the comb. A few open cells can be normal, but many sunken, dark, or damaged caps may be a warning sign.

How Long Does It Take for Bees to Cap Brood?

Worker bees usually cap a brood cell about nine days after the queen lays the egg. The developing bee stays under the cap until it comes out as an adult worker around day 21. Queens and drones develop on different schedules.

Worker brood stage	What you may see	Usual timing
Egg	Tiny white egg in an open cell	Days 1 to 3
Larva	White curved larva in an open cell	About days 4 to 8
Capped brood	Wax cap over the developing bee	About days 9 to 20
Adult worker	Bee chews through the cap and comes out	Around day 21

Do Bees Store Honey in the Brood Box?

Yes. A brood box can hold brood, pollen, nectar, capped honey, and empty cells. The name describes the main part of the hive where brood is raised, not everything stored in every cell.

Frames may contain both brood and honey. Harvesting honey from a brood box is a separate management decision and should not be based only on whether a frame contains capped honey.

What Does Healthy Brood Look Like?

During the active season, look for eggs, white larvae, and capped brood in a fairly steady patch. Brood amounts change with the season, weather, food, and colony size, so compare several frames and use notes from earlier inspections.

If eggs are missing or the pattern stays scattered, read [How Can I Tell if My Queen Is Healthy?](#) Do not replace the queen based on one unusual-looking frame.

How Should I Check Brood?

Inspect brood on a calm day above 55°F. Hold each frame over the open hive, use good light, and return it gently when you are done. Read [How Often Should I Inspect My Beehive?](#) and [What Should I Look for When Inspecting My Beehive?](#) for a complete inspection plan.

For cold-weather preparation, read [How Do You Winterize a Beehive?](#)

Finding the adult queen can be hard on a busy brood frame. Use [How Can I Identify a Queen Bee?](#) to learn the body features that make her stand out.

References

- [Best Management Practices for Honey Bee Colonies](#)
- [Bees: Background and Biology](#)
- [USU Beekeeping Annual Calendar](#)
- [European Honey Bee](#), University of Florida IFAS Extension
- [Queen Cell Production](#), Penn State Extension

Adapted from USU Extension beekeeping and honey bee biology resources.

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