Harvesting the most beautiful honeycomb from traditional Japanese beehive.

Japan has two types of honeybees, the imported Western bee, and the native Japanese honey bee. A pile box hive is structured so that Japanese honey bees can build their combs downward, just as they would in the wild.
The comb is initially used to keep larvae, but as the colony extends downwards, the queen bee lays her eggs further down into the new comb. The comb originally used for raising brood is then used to store honey. The colony is structured so that honey is stored in the upper boxes and larvae are reared in the lower boxes. This means that as the colony grows, beekeepers add boxes to the bottom of the colony, not the top like with Western honeybees being kept in a Lang troth hive. Honeycomb initially starts out white but becomes darker from raising larvae. This means the comb can be quite dark by the time the bees use it to store honey.

Inspection

White comb containing honey is very beautiful, so we would like to see if it’s possible to get the bees to build comb upwards instead of downwards. To start with, check to see how far down the colony has expanded the honeycomb by removing the bottom board and taking a look under the hive. Normally we would place a box at the bottom of the colony. Instead, we will place a new box on the top of the colony. I hope that the bees will build a new comb in the top box since there is no more space to expand at the bottom. The bees only store honey in the upper region of the hive. So no larvae will initially be placed in the comb.

Conditions

This should result in a pure white comb filled with honey. The colony selected for this experiment is very strong. There is also sufficient flora available. A weak colony would not be able to build upwards, especially if there were an insufficient nectar source.
Next, take off the lid of the box and remove the bees with a blower. After that, she takes off the duckboard to reveal the comb below. The honey is very light and from the springtime. We will add this box to the top of the hive. Normally the boxes contain a crossbar to prevent the comb from dropping but this box does not contain any.

Setting the box

Carefully brush away the bees to prevent them from being crushed. There will probably be several weeks or months until the entire box is filled with comb and honey. It is no longer summer and four months have passed since we first set up the top box. We remove the lid and reveal that the duct board is covered in lots of bees. These are removed with a blower to prepare for the duct board removal. The duct board is firmly attached to the honeycomb a good sign that the box has been filled to the top with combs. use the wire to detach the duct board.

Extracting honeycomb

Honey in beautiful white combs is revealed. Now we will remove the top box to take out the honeycomb. Since this honey was produced in the fall it is a bit darker than the honey collected in the spring. Use a blower to remove any remaining bees and will place the top box in a plastic container. Now you can take the box to cut out the comb. This is the honeycomb removed from the top box. The comb is all one consistent color. There is no darkening since no brood was raised in the comb. We have prepared some jars and a net to filter the honey.

Packaging

We will cut the comb into smaller pieces to fit inside the jars, and filter the rest of the comb by hand to get the honey. The honeycomb is carefully placed in the jars and the rest into the net to be filtered. After placing the honeycomb into the last jar, we cut up the remaining comb to be stored. We then squeeze the comb by hand to get the honey out. This is a budget-friendly way to extract honey if you do not have a honey press. The honey extracted is added to the jars with the comb. At last, we have beautiful jars filled with honeycomb and honey from Japan’s native bees.