

Patterson's Page

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We all know that bees do not like old, stale foundation, but will they use it if they need to? Roger Patterson found out.

I have made my own foundation for over fifty years on a German Herzog press, using my own wax and some that other beekeepers do not want. Several years ago a lady phoned me and said she was moving into a smaller house and had some old beekeeping kit to dispose of and she asked if I would like it. Amongst it was some brood and shallow foundation of Dadant manufacture, which I remembered was sold by Steele and Brodie of Wormit, Fifeshire, that I knew ceased trading in the 1980s. The lady said she bought it in the early 1970s when she lived in Scotland. The foundation was in cardboard boxes, with just a sheet of tissue paper between, no plastic bags as we get today, as can be

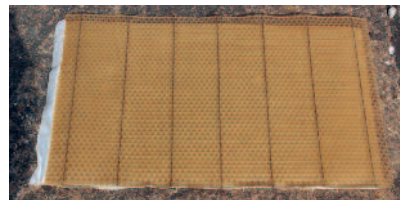


The unused foundation was separated by tissue paper. All photos by Roger Patterson.

seen in the photo below. Like others, I usually advise beekeepers not to use old, stale foundation because the bees often chew holes in it or build wild comb on the face, so I decided to melt it down for making new foundation. I did this with all the shallow, but not the brood foundation.

In June 2017 I had a good nectar flow, had run out of supers and the bees needed more space. Although I had some of my own foundation I did not have time to wire the frames and embed it. In desperation, I used the Dadant foundation that was well over forty years old. It had a white bloom on it and had lost all the aroma that new foundation has. This was against the teaching that I and others give, but the result shows that beekeeping often has surprises.

20 June was a warm day with full sun. I laid the foundation on flattish ground in the sun for a few moments where it quickly lost the white bloom and became very pliable. I then took it indoors and laid it on a flat surface to cool down before inserting into frames. To my surprise the bees built out the combs beautifully, showing that with a little work older foundation can be restored. I only made up frames for one brood box initially because I was sure I was going to fail, but when I saw the bees drawing the foundation out well I did another three boxes over the next couple of weeks.



The sheets were laid on the ground in the sun, but not long enough for them to melt.

Usually, I get my brood foundation drawn out above the queen excluder using the brood box as a super, see <http://www.dave-cushman.net/bee/broodcombdrawing.html>, because I find the bees do a far better job of drawing it out there than when I put it directly into the brood box. This makes life easy because when the bees have capped the combs, they can be uncapped straight away and extracted. It would have been interesting to have had that foundation analysed to see if it contained any chemicals as has been discovered in modern foundation.



A close-up of the comb created from foundation that was well over forty years old.

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