



# SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2023

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

I would like to thank past President Noel Williams for his leadership over the last year. Noel brought about some changes that helped NIBA move forward during his time in office. I would also like to thank Ron Willer for being a Director last year.

As I sit here and write this the weather outside isn't so frightful, it's been fairly nice with a little snow and temperatures that have stayed out of the really cold part of the thermometer. Will this trend help our bees overwinter? Only time will tell but I'm sure some of us have opened our hives to get a sense of how they're doing so far this winter. I've heard from a few people whose bees have already died and others who have bees that are doing well. Hopefully your bees make it through this winter which has been mild so far.

As your new President I want to thank you for your confidence in me to lead NIBA for another year. Going forward I would like to share the workload so we don't have the same people doing most of the work. We have so many talented people who love to talk to others about bees that we should be able to have new people volunteering at each event. Most people I've talked to after volunteering at the Fair tell me that it was more fun than they expected, it doesn't have to be a big commitment usually 3-4 hours so please consider volunteering at an event in 2024.

I would like to wish everyone a happy holiday season, whether that's Merry Christmas, Happy Hannukah or anything else your family celebrates.

Tom



Each year fledgling beekeepers are drawn to join the Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association. The mystique of keeping bees calls to them and they are in search of guidance. I offer the following thoughts for this cadre of initiates.

---

## Thoughts for those who think they want to start with bees in 2024

Larry Krengel

A lot of you reading this are seasoned beekeepers. This might be old hat... just seem common sense to you. Yet, each year we have dozens of want-to-be beekeepers throwing in lots with NIBA. I write this for them...

If one wished a preoccupation that is simply mastered, consider paint-by-by number. Beekeeping will not fill that bill. Mastery will be illusive. Beginning with bees is a significant challenge.

The first ~~year~~ years of beekeeping can be trying. A successful beekeeping adventure begins before the bees arrive that initial spring.

When should I start with bees? Now. December. Well before the bees arrive. A running start will make the challenge more manageable.

- Start by reading a good book or two. For years I have recommended these for starters –

*The First Lessons in Beekeeping*, Keith Delaplane

Available from Dadant and Company,  
dadant.com

*The Joys of Beekeeping*, Richard Taylor

Available on Amazon and elsewhere

*The Complex Life of the Honey Bee*, Purdue University

Available online at –

[https://mdc.itap.purdue.edu/item.asp?Item\\_Number=PPP-116](https://mdc.itap.purdue.edu/item.asp?Item_Number=PPP-116)

- Invest in a beekeeping class or two. Learn the basics and the lingo. Discuss the challenges of keeping bees.
- Hang around with beekeepers. Join an association... or two. Social osmosis is an excellent educational tool.
- Subscribe. There are two bee periodicals in the US - *Bee Culture* published by the A. I. Root Company (Subscribe by phone at 800 289 7668) and *The American Bee Journal* published by Dadant and Company (Subscribe by phone at 888 922 1293).
- Assemble and prepare your equipment early. It will require some time and needs to be ready when the bees arrive.
- Find a source for bees and place an order early.

- Begin with two colonies. Ask an experience beekeeper why this is good advice.

In our area there is a window of opportunity for starting a honeybee colony. Establishing colonies in April or May has long been the standard for good reason. Today bees can be purchased until September. In our climate shepherding a late season start is difficult... even harder yet for a first-year beekeeper.

As beekeeping has become more popular, there has been much talk about the variety of hives for keeping bees. Some marketed as "just better", others as more natural, some easier, quaint or unique. The **Langstroth hive** has long been the standard (but admittedly not only) hive used in North America. It has had a trial run of 170 years. There is a reason it is still the most used. Beginning with a traditional Langstroth hive provides availability of uniform hive pieces and is supported by a plethora of literature, vintage and current. Many experienced beekeeper can readily lend a hand to a nubee using a Langstroth hive. That cannot be said for many of the atypical hives. Start with the norm and save experimenting with the unusual for later in your beekeeping career when greater insight can often save the day.

Bees are intriguing. The apiary draws one back. The desire to be the master of the beeyard will nicely never be completely satisfied. The brotherhood of keepers is a welcoming place...

- ***Invest in a beekeeping class or two. Learn the basics and the lingo. Discuss the challenges of keeping bees.***
- ***Hang around with beekeepers. Join an association... or two. Social osmosis is an excellent educational tool.***
- ***Subscribe. There are two bee periodicals in the US - Bee Culture published by the I. Root Company (Subscribe by phone at 800 289 7668) and The American Bee Journal published by Dadant and Company (Subscribe by phone at 888 922 1293).***
- ***Assemble and prepare your equipment early. It will require some time and needs to be ready when the bees arrive.***
- ***Find a source for bees and place an order early.***
- ***Begin with two colonies. Ask an experience beekeeper why this is good advice.***

In our area there is a window of opportunity for starting a honeybee colony. Establishing colonies in April or May has long been the standard for good reason. Today bees can be purchased until September. In our climate shepherding a late season start is difficult... even harder yet for a first-year beekeeper.

As beekeeping has become more popular, there has been much talk about the variety of hives for keeping bees. Some marketed as "just better", others as more natural, some easier, quaint or unique. The Langstroth hive has long been the

standard (but admittedly not only) hive used in North America. It has had a trial run of 170 years. There is a reason it is still the most used. Beginning with a traditional Langstroth hive provides availability of uniform hive pieces and is supported by a plethora of literature, vintage and current. Many experienced beekeeper can readily lend a hand to a nubee using a Langstroth hive. That cannot be said for many of the atypical hives. Start with the norm and save experimenting with the unusual for later in your beekeeping career when greater insight can often save the day.

Bees are intriguing. The apiary draws one back. The desire to be the master of the beeyard will nicely never be completely satisfied. The brotherhood of keepers is a welcoming place...

Advice from a Honey Bee  
Create a Buzz  
Sip life's sweet moments  
Mind your own beeswax  
Work together  
Always find your way home  
Stick close to your honey  
Bee yourself



## Beekeeping Classes at MCC

McHenry County College

Crystal Lake, Illinois

815 455 8758

McHenry County College has become a center for winter and spring beekeeper education. The four-evening Beekeeping 101 class provided a great foundation for the new beekeeper. Classes in honeybee queen rearing and the production of comb honey offer interesting challenges for the small-scale beekeeper, while a beeyard practicum class gives hands on experience. Classes begin February 7, 2024. *Classes can be taken in person or online.*



**Beekeeping 101** for the person new to beekeeping.

**Seven Ways to Rear a Queen** for the small-scale beekeeper wanting locally accommodated queens.

**Comb Honey** for the beekeeper wanting a new (but old fashioned) challenge.

**Beekeeping Field Study** for the guided experience in handling honeybee colonies.

More information is available –

[https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassListing.ClassListingDisplay&int\\_category\\_id=7&int\\_sub\\_category\\_id=38&int\\_catalog\\_id=3#grp\\_0](https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassListing.ClassListingDisplay&int_category_id=7&int_sub_category_id=38&int_catalog_id=3#grp_0)



Classes will be held on the main campus, 8900 Northwest Hwy #14, Crystal Lake, IL and at the extension Shah Center at 4100 W Shamrock Ln, McHenry, IL 60050

## CHORES OF THE MONTH – DECEMBER

*Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.*

John Leibinger

### What's happening in the hive?

**Not much that can be visually observed unless we have some additional warm days.** Winter is here. Not officially until later in the month, but for the skeptics, put on your shorts and sandals and take a walk outside. For all intents and purposes and certainly from the bees' standpoint, winter is here. The colony will now be broodless and the queen will be reproductively inactive for the next couple of months.

The bees will be clustering to maintain colony warmth for the next several months. They will be consuming the food that they have stored away specifically for this purpose. The heater bees at the inside of the cluster will be producing heat and the bulk of the rest of the workers will be surrounding them, maintaining layers of insulation to minimize loss of that precious heat.\* Some of those outer bees will perish and fall to the bottom board. Undertaker bees will periodically push the bodies to the front of the hive (possibly blocking off hive egress at the bottom entrance). The bees will slowly rotate from the colder outside layers of the cluster to inner layers to warm up. This will continue throughout the winter. The cluster itself will also very slowly migrate around the hive in an effort to stay near stored food. They are in survival mode.

\*There has been some recent research by Derek Mitchell at the University of Leeds in England that is challenging the idea that the outer mantle of bees in a winter cluster is functioning as an insulation layer, but rather it is actually functioning as a heat sink in the cluster. This could be another 'Sam Ramsey' moment dispelling old tenets of beekeeping (mites don't feed on hymolymth, but rather on fat bodies in bees). Much more to come on this with additional research.

### For All Beekeepers:

**This is not the time to be breaking into the hive bodies and disrupting the seals or the winter cluster.**

**If there should be a short warm spell in the 40's, you could consider an Oxalic Acid (OA) sublimation treatment** to eliminate any remaining varroa mites that may have been in the colony or brought in by a late season robbing episode. (You can sublime OA at lower temperatures, but the lower the temperature the tighter the bees cluster. A tight cluster prevents the OA from getting much past the outer layer of bees and thus becomes less effective). One advantage of an OA sublimation this time of year (besides the obvious effectiveness it has when treating a broodless colony) is that you will not need to crack open the hive bodies and ruin the hive's propolis seal that was created to keep out the imminent winter winds. If you have been on top of your mite treatment program this should not be needed now.

**Periodically walk out to your hives and take an external look at them.** Remove snow (assuming it snows this month) from around the entrance and look to see that there haven't been any pests causing a problem (as best you can without opening the hive).

**Make sure that if you incorporate an upper entrance/exit, that it is clear of snow and debris.** It helps with ventilation and it is an easy egress point for bees to take cleansing flights in the winter. Sometimes the lower entrances get plugged with ice or snow and even with dead bees. (Note: Do this if you keep ventilation hives. If you follow the condensing hive philosophy, see links and info in October and November 'Chores').

**Consider strapping down your hive(s) for the winter to prevent winter winds from toppling a hive.** I have had a heavily weighted nuc blow over during high winds in the past.

**If you have been a conscientious beekeeper** throughout the 2023 season and have monitored and controlled varroa mites, left the bees with sufficient stores, ended the year with healthy bees and a young queen (less than a year old), you have provided your bees with the chance of thriving in Spring 2024. Still no guarantee, but you have tilted the odds in their favor.

### Start preparing for the 2024 season:

Renew your annual Apiary Registration with Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Clean up any dead outs that you have experienced this season.

Continue to increase your knowledge of bees and beekeeping:

- Read and study about bees and beekeeping
- Listen to some podcasts or watch youtube videos. Some personal favorites are The Beekeepers Corner Podcast hosted by Kevin Inglin, Two Bees in a Podcast with Jamie Ellis, and youtube videos by Ian Stepler (The Canadian Beekeepers Blog), Kaman Reynolds, Bob Binnie, Gary Reuter at The University of Minnesota, and Paul Kelly at The University of Guelph.

- Attend beekeeping meetings
- Increase your knowledge of local plants and trees and the timing of their blooms....**Very Important and often neglected** (or just not top of mind). This is a great way to spend some of your off season time if you are looking to improve your beekeeping skills. Encourage your club to get a speaker from one of the Chicago area botanical gardens.
- Form a small group of beekeepers to meet for lunch and talk bees.

Inventory your equipment, tools, and supplies.

Start repairing/refurbishing equipment as needed.

Set aside some money - for replacement or expansion bees, new/replacement equipment and supplies, and association dues.

Review your 2023 season (and your notes) for successes and opportunities.

Think about new goals for 2024.

## General Info

Download the forms to register your bees with the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

<https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/agr/Insects/Bees/Documents/beekeep.pdf> (Ctrl+Click link)

## And Finally,

Get a plate of your favorite snacks. Pour yourself a cup of tea...or whatever your preferred means of hydration... add honey of course... and

**Kick back, rest, and enjoy the Holidays with your family and friends.**

**There is a new beekeeping season just around the corner!**



## NEWSLETTER EDITOR

If anyone has anything they would like to contribute to the newsletter or if they have any ideas of things they would like to see in the newsletter, please email me at

[spinkawa@gmail.com](mailto:spinkawa@gmail.com)



## We Made It 2023

Larry Krengel

Fall has come and gone. I would like to think my bees are set for winter. I will visit them occasionally for the next month or so as weather allows, but I will do nothing that requires digging deep into the hive. I try to bother the bees little until the winter weather breaks as the new season begins. They have organized the food and brood area as mother nature trained them to over a million years. The hive has been sealed strategically with propolis. At this point would my interference improve the situation? Hummmm....

There are those beekeepers that would like to "manage" their bees through the winter. Some go into the hive to move frames placing them where it seems the bees might best use them. That is not my style. If I and the bees have done well in preparing for the coming cold, I will let them take charge.



Some of my colonies will receive the Mountain Camp treatment – basically five pounds of sugar on top of newspaper placed on top of the frames in the top box. A shim will give me the extra space I need. Inner cover and telescoping cover will go on top.

The sugar provides a bit of insulation above the cluster, food if needed, and will absorb some of the moisture created by the bees. Later a quick peak will tell me if additional sugar is needed. I prefer to disturb the winter cluster as little as possible.

Happily, the yellow jacket season has ended. Good riddance. I have mouse guards on all the colonies and have reduced the entrances appropriately. The recent snow has added a bit of insulation to the tops of the hives. It would be nice if it would stay.

I had an interesting observation during one of my last visits to the apiary. I was sitting and watching the reduced entrance on the landing board on one of my colonies. The mouse guard has 3/8 inch holes. Apparently a yellow jacket had entered the colony and the bees had killed it. There was a team effort to remove the bright yellow dead body through the mouse guard. It was challenging. After a number of minutes they moved the deceased to the front porch. A single worker proceeded to fly off with the body depositing it at a distance from the colony. Job well done.

Time to plan for the 2024 bee season. Now looking for a new challenge for my bees and their keeper.





**NORTHERN ILLINOIS BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION**

**2024 APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP**

Affiliated with the Illinois State Beekeepers Association (ISBA)

Check one:  Renewal Individual Membership - \$20       Renewal Family Membership - \$30

Check one:  NEW Individual Membership - \$25       NEW Family Membership - \$35

(Includes Single Membership in the Illinois State Beekeepers Association, additional ISBA memberships, \$10 each)

**If applying after February 29, 2024 and you are a renewing member, please add \$5.00.**

Name(s):		
Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Phone:		
Email address (if family membership, include all emails. Newsletter will be sent to all emails):		

Yes, I would like to order a NIBA name tag(s), add \$16.95 per order (which includes postage).

Name tag(s) should read as follows (please print clearly):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please tell us more about yourself:

I have been a NIBA Member since \_\_\_\_\_ (year)      I plan to have \_\_\_\_\_ colonies/hives this season

I have been a beekeeper for about \_\_\_\_\_ years      I am a Master Gardener/Beekeeper \_\_\_\_\_

Check all that applies:

I sell honey \_\_\_ willing to Coach/Mentor \_\_\_ Swarm Catcher \_\_\_ willing to remove Bees from buildings \_\_\_

Personal skills I would be willing to donate to NIBA (i.e. Beekeeping experience, accounting, webmaster, event planning, community education, carpentry, legal, business management, retail knowledge, other)

<p>Complete this form and mail with <b>check payable to: NORTHERN ILLINOIS BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION (NIBA)</b>                  TO: NIBA Membership, c/o Ralph Brindise, 517 Northlake Road, Lakemoor, IL 60051</p>
---

## Website and Newsletter Submissions

[www.nibainfo.org](http://www.nibainfo.org) – The Northern Illinois Beekeepers Association website. A wealth of information is available. Contact board members via email, download the membership form, access copies of the newsletter. Terri is asking for your pictures, stories, etc. to have them highlighted on the web page!  
[reevestherese@att.net](mailto:reevestherese@att.net)

This is YOUR newsletter. Please feel free to contribute. Or let us know if you have any topics you'd like to see covered. [spinkawa@gmail.com](mailto:spinkawa@gmail.com)

### 2024 NIBA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

President – Tom Allen  
[tallen122@yahoo.com](mailto:tallen122@yahoo.com)  
 Vice President – Ryan Harrison  
[rharrison74@gmail.com](mailto:rharrison74@gmail.com)  
 Secretary – Kristen Mueller  
[khuschitt@gmail.com](mailto:khuschitt@gmail.com)  
 Treasurer - Ralph Brindise  
[rbrindise@att.net](mailto:rbrindise@att.net)  
 Director - John Leibinger  
[jleibinger@aol.com](mailto:jleibinger@aol.com)  
 Director - Al Fullerton  
[adfhoneymail@gmail.com](mailto:adfhoneymail@gmail.com)  
 Director – Andre Szechowycz  
[aszzech804@gmail.com](mailto:aszzech804@gmail.com)

Program Chair – Larry Krengel  
 Webmaster – Terri Reeves  
 Newsletter Editor – Sue Pinkawa  
 Club Extractor Coordinator – Al Fullerton  
 Club Raffle Coordinator – John Leibinger  
 Snack Coordinator – Sally Willer

## Honey Extractor

Did you know that your membership in NIBA includes the opportunity to rent one of the clubs 3 honey extractors?

Two of the extractors are manual, a 4 frame a 3 frame. The third is motorized and is capable of extracting both sides of 9 frames at a time.

Rental fee for either of the manual extractor is \$10.00 for 3 days with a \$10.00 security deposit. The electric (motorized) 9 frame extractor costs \$25.00 to rent for 2 days with a \$75.00 security deposit. Deposits will be returned if equipment is returned on time, clean, and undamaged.

The extractors come with most equipment needed to make the uncapping and extraction experiences go smoothly, except of course, the honey frames and buckets.

To reserve a date contact AL Fullerton by phone or text at 815-382-7139 or email [adfhoneymail@gmail.com](mailto:adfhoneymail@gmail.com), if you don't get a timely response, just phone. Pick it up in Cary Illinois.

**The queen marking color for 2023 is RED.**

**The queen marking color for 2024 is Green.**