



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – MAY 2026

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

Hopefully those of you that ordered packages or nucs got them installed without any problems. We had great weather to install them unlike previous years where we had snow! I hope those of you who didn't order bees had colonies that overwintered. We know that overwintered colonies can explode so you need to watch for signs of swarming or better yet do a split and make one colony into two.

We're coming into the beginning of nice weather on a more regular basis and the colonies will begin to show growth in numbers which is fun to watch. Seeing a bee emerge or seeing an orientation flight are just a couple of the things I look forward to seeing as a beekeeper. During Larry's class he talked about just sitting and watching the bees come and go from the hive and I didn't think I would enjoy that. He compared it to people who enjoy watching fish in an aquarium which I don't find enjoyable or relaxing. I do find watching bees land with their pollen pockets full of colorful pollen really relaxing, wondering where the pollen is coming from, trying to remember the pollen color chart to think about what flowers or trees the pollen is coming from.

We have quite a few new beekeepers in NIBA and we're trying to help them out during the 630 to 7 time newbie portion of the meeting by moving where we meet. Instead of meeting in our main meeting room where everyone is talking and finding out how everything is going we're going to meet in the hallway of the A building where the transfer center is. As you enter the building it's in the hallway on the left just past the offices, there are white chairs setup around a few round tables. Anyone can be there to ask questions so beginning with the May meeting stop by on your way to the meeting room to get some answers to your questions.



We will be holding regular mentor sessions on Saturdays at the MCC hives, which Saturday of the month and the times are still to be decided. I hope to have more concrete information very shortly. If you'd like to help us out during the mentor sessions please text me at 815-861-1237 we can always use some help!

From time to time we get requests from people selling equipment, people who are looking for some property to put bees or someone who is looking for a beekeeper to put bees on their property. We will do our best to get that information out to the club so someone can address the need.

It was suggested during our last Board meeting that instead of using SignupGenius for the McHenry County Fair I go back to using a pad of paper with the shifts listed so people can sign up or tell me they're unavailable while looking me in the eye LOL. I'm going to bring it to our next meeting, kind of the same as when I used SignupGenius please put your t-shirt size next to your name. If you want to work with a particular person or couple please feel free to let me know what day and shift (figure the last one of the day will be 6-9 or 6-10 depending on the day of the week you pick) you want and I'll block it off. The Fair begins Tuesday July 29th at noon and will close on August 3rd at 8PM. We will need help loading the Fair items up at the storage unit and setting the booth up on Monday July 28th and breaking it down on Sunday August 3rd at *PM.

We have sold most of the honey we have so honey donations are needed badly!!

Thank you all!

Tom



May NIBA Meeting

The May NIBA meeting will have a Zoom presenter with David Peck. His presentation will be on nectar flows.

David is the Director of Research and Education at Betterbee in Greenwich, NY, where he assists in product development and research, and teaches classes and develops scientifically-sound educational materials. His doctoral work in Cornell University's Department of Neurobiology and Behavior was supervised by Professor Tom Seeley. His dissertation research focused on the transmission of mites between bee colonies, as well as the mite-resistance traits of the untreated honey bees living in Cornell's Arnot Forest.

After earning his degree, he has continued to research varroa/bee interactions, including fieldwork in Newfoundland, Canada (where varroa still have not arrived) and Anosy Madagascar (where varroa arrived only in 2010 or 2011). He has served as a teaching postdoctoral fellow in Cornell's Department of Entomology, and is still affiliated with Cornell through the Honey Bee Health program in the College of Veterinary Medicine. David has kept bees for more than a decade, though his home apiary is often full of mite-riddled research colonies, so he doesn't usually produce much honey.

Our regular meeting will start at 7:00 at McHenry County College. The zoom presentation will start at 7:30. Here is the Zoom link for the meeting on Thursday, May 14th at 7:30 pm Central time.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89398017679?pwd=z22A8a8sd2UlvQNjPwhWhfpIs8nFwU.1>

Please **DO NOT** join the meeting until 7:30 since the presenter will be in a different presentation.





Batten the Hatches! It is Swarm Season

Thoughts from the Beeline

Larry Krengel

Not all swarms are created equal. I recently bumped into an old-time beekeeper while in the UP of Michigan. He asked me if I knew where he could buy a *swarm*. Interesting. He had to be an old-timer. To me a swarm hangs in a tree and you don't have to buy it. We have gotten away from using that term as it was used back in beekeeping history, back in the era before packages of bees became the norm.

The term swarm has been around for a long time making its origin difficult to pinpoint. Back in the Middle Ages – when bees were popular as the lone source of sweetness – the term swarm was associated with *agitated* and *confused*. In old German the term was *swarm*. The Vikings used the term *svarmr* that translated to mean *tumult*. The old meanings seem to reflect the appearance of chaos in the natural swarm... a human evaluation. To the bees, it is but business as usual.

In Langstroth's time a swarm was specific to the mass of bees that left a parent hive to create a daughter colony. It was a natural swarm. At some time along the beekeeping journey, the idea of a "shook" swarm appeared as a means of forcing the splitting of a colony to develop additional bee holdings. The beekeeper would shake some of the bees from one colony into an empty hive box (or skep or bee gum) hoping to develop a new colony. With the understanding of the nature of queens and queen development, we got better at shook swarms. Seldom do we hear the term used that way anymore. Today's packaged bees are a refinement... maybe an industrialization... of the shook swarm. We now acquire packages rather than swarms.

A package is not like a natural swarm. The "attitude" of the natural swarm is very different from that of an artificial swarm. The natural swarm has a native allegiance to the old queen that joins in the swarm. The members of the swarm share pheromones from having previously shared an abode. The workers that join the swarm have gorged themselves on honey needed to start the comb in the new residence. It's the bee version of Thanksgiving dinner. Instead of sleeping off the full stomach, the bees hang patiently in a tree. Being full of honey they tend to be quite docile. There is a genetic directive to aggressively build comb in the new residence as soon as the site is chosen.

The package of bees – a shook swarm - is shaken from a variety of colonies having varied pheromones. There is no primitive directive to choose sides – who stays and who goes in the swarm - and to prepare to swarm. They do not necessarily come from the same parent colony. The new queen in the package is foreign to all the workers. The worker bees in



the swarm have not been forewarned to take a stomach full of honey along. The genetic mandate that excites and incites a natural swarm is not present.

A natural swarm builds comb at numbing speed. A package of bees will build comb out of necessity, not passion. If a natural and an artificial swarm are set side by side in a comb building race, my money is on the natural swarm.

Now that I have extolled the virtues of Mother Nature's swarm and cast dispersions on the shook variety, I will admit the reality of today's American backyard beekeeper requires the use of the packaged swarm.

To my UP beekeeping friend, the swarm you asked for is not really a swarm. It is an artificial creature – a Frankenstein of a real swarm.

When we create and install a package of honey bees, we place the bees in a situation with multiple stresses and challenges. The first of which is to meet and accept a queen that is foreign to every bee. Bees live most of their life in dark communicating with pheromones. In a functioning hive, the queen provides a pheromone announcing her presence and assuring the colony that they are queen right. In the package that message must be reestablished centered on the new queen who is travelling with the shook swarm in her royal cage.

The workers had no forewarning of the impending shaking. Unlike the natural swarm, they will not have a full stomach for the trek. All ten or so thousand workers have to survive on a can of sugar water with three little holes.

When the package is hived they will need to begin producing comb, a task that older bees are not generally asked to perform. Both nectar and pollen are needed post haste. The age-related jobs – house bees, nurses, foragers - in the hive are in disarray. It is a stressful situation.

Perhaps an understanding of the significant stress placed on swarms might allow us to cut the package bees a little slack. Just a couple of thoughts of how to ease the stress on the new colony.

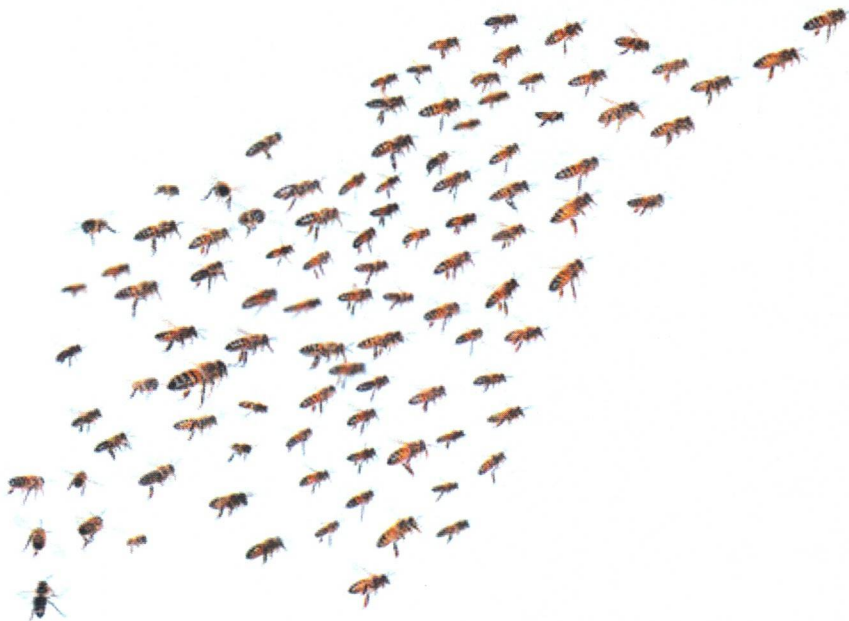
1. Install a package promptly.
2. Slow release the queen.
3. Offer the new group food and pollen.
4. Initially use a follower board to limit the brood space.
5. Consider installing the package in a nuc box first.
6. Provide drawn comb.



7. Use wax not plastic foundation.
8. Resist using caustic mite treatments while bees accommodate.
9. Keep screened bottom boards closed.
10. Move slow. Speak gently.

I have had the opportunity to visit and talk with beekeepers from the United Kingdom who have a longer beekeeping history than we Americans. They find the dependence of US beekeepers on packages of bees to be strange... even offensive. I sense that they look down on any of their cohorts who buys a package. I know of no UK package producers. It seems any packages sold there are imported, often from Italy. They accentuate sustainable beekeeping. The goal is for a beekeeper or a local group to satisfy their need for replacement colonies with splits of existing colonies. That is a very appealing idea. Each year, I buy some bee. It makes life easier and helps with having strong colonies for producing good honey crops. Yet, the idea of being self-sufficient is quite alluring – a new life style. Perhaps a good goal to work towards.

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Chores of the Month – May 2026

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

John Leibinger

What's happening in the hive....and around us?

You should be observing a lot of pollen collection daily. There was a lot of pale yellow maple pollen (or light gray from red maples) coming in during April and finally the telltale tangerine color of dandelions. Dandelions seem plentiful this year, the fruit trees are starting to come into bloom. Life is good in the beehive! You may also notice that they are consuming sugar syrup at an increasing rate in early May. It will slow down as more and more natural nectar becomes available. Keep them well fed to promote colony growth, but remove if you have the opportunity to collect early honey. Packages hived in April have been steadily declining in numbers since installation as older bees die off. That will be changing now. The new package colonies will be producing their first new adult bees for 2026 around the time you are reading this and should have a mix of brood in all stages (BIAS). In the next few weeks their populations will increase very rapidly. Within a couple weeks, depending on how early you installed your bees and your mix of new foundation or drawn comb, the colony should be about ready for the addition of a second box (if you are managing via a two deep hive body process, or supers if managing via a single brood box approach), so be prepared. Alternately, if you are utilizing an all medium box management process, you may soon be adding a third box (that box may be an additional brood box or honey super depending on your management philosophy and how the weather plays out). Nucs hived in late April will have built out new foundation (or be well into the process) they were provided in their brood box and may well be requiring the addition of a second box or honey supers, again, depending on your personal management practice and goals...and the weather. The weather will have a significant influence on the rate at which the bees build out their comb....so far its been pretty good. Based on Growing Degree Days (my reference is Huntley, IL) we are about 2 weeks ahead of last year. That may be coming to a slowdown. The national weather outlook for the northern Midwest is predicting a colder and drier than normal May. Booo on you National Weather Service! For those of us whose glasses are half full (or maybe slightly rose colored for the other type of glasses), if you started with moderately strong overwintered colonies or with early nucs and now have strong single brood box colonies, and the weather is better than predicted, getting supers on in early May could be the winning ticket for early honey. Sounds like a lot of conditions need to be met though. Watch the weather and your colony development. Try not to miss the early opportunity if it comes about.

Overwintered colonies, depending on their strength, will be building population fairly quickly (again, weather dependent) and are likely candidates for swarming from now until the end of June. You will notice some drones already walking your comb and will likely see additional drone BIAS. If you see a fair amount, consider this a precursor to potential swarming if you have overwintered colonies (or strong nuc starts for that matter).

For Beekeepers with live overwintered colonies, it is time to:

Feed. Sugar syrup at 1:1 ratio (2 lbs sugar/1 qt water).(If Needed) This is a conventional mix this time of year to stimulate the colony to increase brood rearing. Some will opt to dilute the syrup even a bit more, maybe 1 part sugar to 1.5 or 2 parts water to more closely simulate the sugar concentration in nectar. A small amount of heat will dissolve the sugar quickly. Allow to cool before feeding to bees. Beware that you can over feed. If you notice that the bees are plugging up the queen's brood box laying space, back off the feeding. You want to stimulate brood rearing, not swarming!

Pollen. pollen substitute. pollen patties. Though my personal observation is that there is a lot of natural pollen coming into the hive right now, these early supplemental protein sources are good insurance to help the colony raise brood if the weather creates difficulties for foraging. The weather can raise havoc on the pollen supplies. A typical colony will consume well upwards of 60 pounds of pollen over the course of the year, so a little early help is a good thing.

Check for swarm cells. A quick check can be made by tilting a complete hive body up and looking at the bottom of the frames for swarm cells (the top box is the most likely box that you will see the swarm cells in unless you have already done a hive body rotation). Be careful not to let the top box slide off when doing this. Get assistance if needed. Consider this quick check a guide only. A complete inspection may be in line if you are suspecting impending swarming.

SUPER UP! If you have a strong colony of foragers, consider removing feed and adding supers to take advantage of early nectar flows. Early honey crops are possible.

Rotate Hive Bodies. If your bees have moved into the top box consider rotating the top box to the bottom. The upside to this is that it provides space for the colony to expand upwards and may reduce or delay the swarming urge. The downside is that you may be dividing the brood nest if it spans both boxes. If this situation exists, addition of a third box above or adding supers may be a better alternative. *My personal take/experience on hive body rotation has been*



that it is not necessary. The bees seem to clean and prepare cells where space is available and the queen has no trouble finding her way there.

Frame Rotation. As temps warm up, consider removing some old frames (w/o brood) and replace with new foundation as part of an annual comb renewal program. Place new foundation frames at the outer positions in the hive. Introducing new foundation may also help delay the onset of swarming if you are removing frames from brood box that are bound up with nectar or pollen.

Remove Winter Wrappings.

Remove mouse guards.

For New Beekeepers just getting started this year:

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)

Finish assembling and painting additional equipment, if you have not already done it. You will need a second deep brood box (or third or fourth if using medium brood boxes) now or very soon. You may need an additional 'cover box' for feed jars or buckets. Let's hope for the best and have honey supers built and ready to install by mid to late May to catch the Black Locust bloom.. Like having a lit smoker, it's better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it. .

Feed your Bees. Feed your Bees. Feed your Bees. This cannot be over-emphasized, especially for packages being started on new foundation. Well fed colonies are larger, more productive, and more capable of producing wax for building honeycomb. Feed them until they stop taking the supplemental feed or until you notice that they are starting to backfill the brood nest with stored syrup (more of a chance of this if you were able to acquire drawn comb to start, but far less likely if starting with new foundation or foundationless). You should be able to monitor their syrup consumption every couple of days without going deep into the hive and causing undue disturbance. When performing an inspection, be sure to check that the bees are not getting 'honeybound' in the broodnest. At some point in the month, they will likely switch over to entirely natural nectar sources at which point you can remove the feeders.

Spend time observing your bees. This is one of the reasons you took up this hobby. Observe their comings and goings. Are they bringing in pollen? What color? What is the source? Take notes.

[Nice Pollen Color Chart by Season](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Get a Mentor from the Bee Club. Ask for help and guidance. Help may be in person, via phone, e-mail, or text but no matter how the communication takes place, it still will be very helpful, if for no other reason than the confidence and peace of mind a good mentor can provide. **Take advantage of the club provided/sponsored mentoring activities.**

For All Beekeepers, it is time to:

Review your Beekeeping Goals for 2026 and act accordingly. See February month's chores list.

Make sure that you keep records. This is a very important element of the learning process...whether you are a first year beekeeper or a forty year beekeeper....you should always be learning something. Consider learning a bit about Growing Degree Days(GDD). This will give you great insight into when your local plants will be blooming. As you see the blooms emerge, or pollen coming in, note the GDD year to date for future reference.

[Explanation of Growing Degree Days](#) (Ctrl + Click link)

[Great Growing Degree Day Chart/Tool](#) (Ctrl + Click link) [Nice Seasonal Pollen Color Chart](#) (Ctrl + Click link)

Record inspection dates, time and temp and weather conditions, quantity of bees, bee behaviors, signs indicating the presence of the queen (eggs, young larvae, actual sighting), number of frames of brood and stores, brood pattern and frame/comb condition, available laying space, observations of signs of swarm preparation, pollen coming in (color, type if possible), drone production, Varroa Mite count, presence of Small Hive Beetle or other pests, and a number of other issues. Record anything else that is outside of 'normal' once you learn what 'normal' is (for new beekeepers, this is a prime reason for having a mentor and for having multiple hives). Take notes in the bee yard. You will be surprised at how easy it is to get confused over what was observed and which hive it was observed in if you wait to record info after the fact. Here is an example of one of many checklists that can be found in a quick Google search. Not necessarily the best...just an example. [Hive Inspection Report](#)(Ctrl+Click link)

Remove entrance reducers. (Or at least increase the opening size) Probably in the early to mid-May timeframe. As forager numbers increase and forage availability peaks, you want to make sure that the bees have quick and easy access



in and out of their hive. This is a very busy and very important time of the year for them to collect and store pollen and nectar. The ready availability of pollen and nectar resources significantly mitigates the issue of robbing this time of year. **Monitor the hives for swarming signs.** Probably not a big problem for new beekeepers that started on new foundation or foundationless, but for the rest, keep your eyes peeled for telltale queen cups at the bottom of the frames. Do they have eggs or larvae in them? If they do, the swarm is coming....if not keep watching and provide additional space immediately (in the brood box by swapping out honey/pollen bound frames and by adding supers)(simply adding supers is usually not enough).

Get your swarm traps out! Anybody interested in getting **FREE BEES?** This is the time of year to take advantage of the natural biological rhythms of the hive. Overwintered colonies are highly likely to swarm. Why not be an opportunist and capture a colony that otherwise will find a hole in a tree? It is fun, challenging, and **IMMENSELY EXCITING** when you find bees in your trap. Additionally, these are often colonies that have overwintered....Northern Illinois proven stock capable of handling our winter....wouldn't you want to add some of that quality to your apiary? Here are several websites to get you started...

[Jason Bruns on Swarm Trapping](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

[Swarm Traps and Bait Hives](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Assemble some gear to be prepared to catch a swarm hanging in a tree, on a fence, or somewhere else they aren't wanted! Be ready in case a friend calls and says "Get here quick, my neighbor is freaking out! There is a bunch of bees hanging on their swing set and we don't know what to do!"

Note: Swarm trapping and swarm 'catching' are two different things. Swarm trapping involves putting out 'bait hives' for bees to find and inhabit (and then join your apiary). Swarm catching involves capturing a swarm from a tree, bush, fence, or any of a hundred other areas that an initial swarm may land at shortly after exiting the hive and while waiting for the scout bees to find a new home. Usually this is the result of a panic phone call you receive from someone who knows you are a beekeeper. This can be an **INTENSELY EXCITING** and rewarding activity.

Get your blood flowing! Capture or Trap a Swarm!



"SO, HOW CAN YOU TELL THE SWARM IS GOING TO LEAVE?"

Welcome to the 2026 Beekeeping Season!

EXTRA

Growing Degree Days (GDD) – Just a primer



GDD are a means used to measure the cumulative warmth in a particular area. It is an estimate but found to be a fairly accurate and useful tool for many (like horticulturalists, farmers, and of course beekeepers) looking to know when plants/crops will reach various stages of development.

The GDD calculation is straight forward. In our area and as it pertains to beekeeping, it is the result of subtracting 50 degrees (referred to as base 50) from the average between the high temperature of the day and the low temperature of the day. If the result is less than zero, there are zero degree days recorded. Each day's accumulation of Growing Degree Days is added to the prior days to provide a cumulative total for the year...and that is what is important to us.

Example: High temp of the day= 70 degrees. Low temp of the day= 50 degrees Average between the two $(70+50=120, 120/2=60)$ is 60 degrees. Remember, this is an estimate, not an hour by hour weighted average temperature.

60 degrees – 50 degrees (the base) = 10 degrees. This is the number of degree days for that particular day.

So, what is the 50-degree base about? Generally (yes, there are exceptions), plant growth/development/blooming is minimal below 50 degrees in our part of the world and for the plants/trees that we have interest in. Once the average temps exceed 50 degrees growth starts and things start to happen.

Why is this important to me as a beekeeper?

Each plant or tree has a specific time in their development when they bloom. This development is directly influenced by the cumulative warmth the plant experiences. GDD is a means to measure that cumulative warmth. If you know that a particularly important tree blooms at 300 GDD, you can influence your colony management to have a maximum foraging force in place when the date for that 300 GDD nectar flow arrives (assuming honey collection is one of your goals).

How? Well, maybe you delay making elective splits until after that particular tree blooms. Maybe you do a Demaree manipulation rather than a split. Maybe you combine that weak hive you have to a stronger one to make a colony with a huge number of foragers to take advantage of the flow. Being aware of the upcoming flow can allow you to control your feeding to maximize early comb production and stopping your feeding so that your honey crop is produced from natural nectars and not partially from sugar syrup. 'Knowing the future' allows you to get supers on in a timely manner to maximize honey production. It also allows you an opportunity to collect 'crop specific' honey. Do you want specific Black Locust 'water white' honey? How about a crop of delicious Linden honey (a personal favorite)? You can do it and knowing about GDD and your local plants/trees GDD bloom timing can be an enormous help.

How do I know a specific plant's/tree's GDD bloom level?

- Ask other beekeepers that have tracked this information.
- Record the GDD bloom number and date each year for different plants/trees and track it. (Have you heard anyone mention record keeping?)
- Consult local arboretums and botanic garden web sites for bloom GDD.
- Contact regional, state, local ag extension services.

Here is a link to a Growing Degree Days calculator. There are others that you can find on the internet.

[Growing Degree Days Calculator](#) (Ctrl += Click)

An advanced look at what's coming in June

- Swarms
- Honey production
- Mite monitoring
- Small Hive Beetle (SHB)

Supplies/equipment that may be needed in June

- Swarm catching/trapping equipment



- Extra equipment for swarm mitigation (Splits, Demaree manipulation, extra broodframes/foundation, etc.)
- Supers and frames (extracting frames, comb honey frames, Ross Rounds, Hogg half combs, etc.)
- Mite monitoring equipment
- Mite control supplies
- Beetle Traps, Swiffer pads, other (nematodes, diatomaceous earth)





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Club Raffle Coordinator – Jim Jellissen

Snack Coordinator – Julianne Anderson

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 adfhoney@gmail.com, if you don't get a timely response, just phone. Pick it up in Cary Illinois.

Website and Newsletter Submissions

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!
reevestherease@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

The queen marking color for 2026 is White

