



# SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2025

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

Well here we are in December, we had a very mild fall but winter kicked in hard and fast! I hope everyone's hive preparations get your bees through this snowy winter.

As a Board we are trying to line up speakers more quickly in the hope that we will eventually have a full year of speakers listed that members can see ahead of time. If you have someone you'd like to see as a speaker please contact one of us with that name.

I hope those members who were at the November meeting had fun at the honey tasting! Cristy Binz suggested we try a black jar honey tasting, something we've never tried before. Cristy had the jars and ran the tasting, putting member's honey in a black jar and using a number system so no one knew who brought what sample in. People were tasting the honey and voting by putting a wooden nickel brought by Al Fullerton into the cup representing that jar of honey. People were also tasting the honey trying to figure out which jar was theirs which led to a lot of tasting. I admit that my nickname is two tastebud Tom around our house so after about the fourth jar they all tasted the same. The judging was tight, there were two jars that had the same number of votes so we were going to let everyone taste just those two jars but Stephanie Slater who is a certified honey judge walked into the room. She hadn't done any tasting so we had her just taste the two tied jars and winner of the best tasting honey of 2025 was Tim Sage!! Thank you to everyone that brought honey and participated.

November is also the month we elect the new NIBA Board members. No one showed any interest in being one of the Officers so the current Board was retained in their positions, Cristy Binz is our Secretary, Sue Pinkewa is our Treasurer, Ralph Brindise is our Vice President and I'm the President. The Board

will discuss the directors positions and appoint them soon. If you have any interest in a directors position please let one of the Board members know.

I want to wish everyone a Happy Holiday season and a safe and Happy New Year!

Tom



## Pictures from Honey Tasting







Greetings Beekeepers –

I walked up to the road to get the mail this afternoon. The sun was surprisingly low in the sky for three o'clock. It is indeed the heart of winter.

Short days are here and beekeepers are looking for something bee related to do. In the beeyard, there is little we can do to be of use. With this year's long fall, my bees were well prepared for winter. They are now in charge until March, on autopilot. Yet it is difficult for us beekeepers to do nothing when we have a nagging curiosity... concern... about what is happening inside our hives.

This last year I installed Govee temperature/humidity sensors in a couple of my hives. It allows me to have a little insight... "Are they still alive?" Any temperature above ambient tells me there is life in the box. That helps a bit. I still need something to do.

The most productive use of my beekeeping urges this time of the year is preparing for next season. Painting boxes and cleaning queen excluders can keep me bee busy, but today making frames is on the agenda. I attempt to replace two old frames with frames holding new foundation in each deep body every spring. That provides me with a winter bee job.

I choose to use wax foundation with crimped vertical wires both in deep brood boxes and in my medium extracting supers. Making wax foundation frames take longer than snapping in plastic foundation, but it is winter and I can work in my warm workshop making frames. I have the time. I selectively recycle the wood from some old frames. All the rest of my replacement frames are made with new wood that needs to be assemble – ten brad nails from my pneumatic nailer in each frame. Some keepers glue frames as they assemble them. I don't. Making frames is a satisfying winter job.

In days gone by, many beekeepers would use wax foundation (plastic has rather recently arrived) and to give them more strength would install horizontal wires in addition to the vertical wires making them less likely to fail in an extractor. Experience has taught me that those extra wires are overkill for my medium depth extracting frames. Perhaps if I were to extract from deep frames I might choose differently. Deep, in their short life (5 years??), never need extra support.

For those (only a few) who still add horizontal wires, the trick is to embed the wires in the wax. To accomplish this one can use a "spur embedder" that press the wire into the wax or use a neat gadget, an electrical embedder, to heat the wires melting them into the foundation. There is a learnable art to making the wires taunt prior to pressing or melting them into the wax.

Have you wondered what the holes in the end bars were for? Now you know.

## The Sweet Life

McHenry County College along with other area colleges are combining to offer a short online introduction to the world of honey bees and beekeeping, *The Sweet Life: A Buzz-Worthy Look into the World of the Honey Bees*. This one and a half hour non-technical gathering is intended for an audience that is available during daytime. Do you know someone who would like to know more about bees, but is not interested in keeping bees? Pass this info on to them.

### *The Sweet Life: A Buzz-Worthy Look into the World of the Honey Bees*

Friday, January 16, 2026 @ 10:00 am

[https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassInfo.ClassInformation&int\\_class\\_id=13501&int\\_category\\_id=0&int\\_sub\\_category\\_id=0&int\\_catalog\\_id=0](https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassInfo.ClassInformation&int_class_id=13501&int_category_id=0&int_sub_category_id=0&int_catalog_id=0)

“Join us for a delightful journey into the fascinating world of honey bees! We'll explore the secret lives of these industrious little creatures, uncovering how they create the delicious honey we all love. From the Queen Bee's royal duties to the amazing teamwork of the worker bees, we'll learn about their incredible communication, their vital role in our ecosystem, and simple ways we can help them thrive. This presentation is full of fun facts and amazing stories about bees.”

## Beekeeping 101 Returns to MCC

“It can't be that hard. Just put the bees in the box in the spring and extract the honey in the fall. Right?”

It is a fact of beekeeping, understanding the basics of the bees and the yards we keep them in is a key to success. If you know someone who intends to begin with bees, suggest that they **not** put the cart before the horse. Take a course to learn the basics before the bees arrive. How about in February?? MCC's Beekeeping 101 runs four Wednesday nights beginning on February 4, 2026. The class can be in person or online. Here is more info –

[https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassInfo.ClassInformation&int\\_class\\_id=12873](https://mchenry.augusoft.net/index.cfm?method=ClassInfo.ClassInformation&int_class_id=12873)

Ho... Ho... Ho... Have a Merry Christmas and a sweet New Year.

Larry



## COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT CENTER

### SPRING 2026



# BEEKEEPING

### Beekeeping 101

Keeping honeybees is fascinating. Bees will pollinate your garden and provide a sweet crop of honey. In this class, you will learn where to start as a keeper of bees. We'll cover bee biology, modern beekeeping techniques, construction of hives, and how to acquire bees. Keep bees for the fun of it, as a sideline job, or to help your garden and orchard.

Fee: \$75

In person

# [12873](#) W 2/4-2/25 6:30-9 p.m. Catalyst Campus

Remote

# [12874](#) W 2/4-2/25 6:30-9 p.m. Remote

Larry Kriegel

### Beekeeping Field Study

This short course will provide practical, hands-on instruction for installing, manipulating, and inspecting colonies of bees. The class will meet in a bee yard, so appropriate clothing and bee equipment will be necessary. Spring is the time to start with bees, and this course will walk you through it step by step. Learn what you need to know to start out right with your bees.

Fee: \$59

Larry Kriegel

# [12906](#) Sa 4/11, 4/18 10 a.m.-Noon MCC

# [12907](#) Sa 4/11, 4/18 1-3 p.m. MCC

### 7 Ways To Raise A Queen

The number of small-scale beekeepers is increasing, and the demand for locally raised queen bees is growing. Purchased queens are often raised in areas of Africanized honeybees or come from migratory bee operations where dangerous viruses are exchanged. Gain information and learn seven simple methods of raising healthy honeybee queens. With a few insights and a small amount of equipment, the backyard beekeeper can raise locally adapted queens from bee stock with a great record of winter survival, good temperament, and excellent honey production.

Fee: \$25

Larry Kriegel

In person

# [12889](#) W 3/4 6:30-9 p.m. Catalyst Campus

Remote

# [12890](#) W 3/4 6:30-9 p.m. Remote

### Comb Honey

Comb honey is old fashioned honey harvested in the bees own wax case. A hundred years ago honey was removed from the hive and eaten in the comb. Today, extracted honey (honey in the jar) is the norm. This course is an opportunity to return to the old (and some contend the healthiest) way of harvesting honey. Producing honey in the comb is a beekeeping challenge, an old fashioned challenge explored in this class.

Fee: \$25

Larry Kriegel

In person

# [12891](#) W 3/11 6:30-9 p.m. Catalyst Campus

Remote

# [12892](#) W 3/11 6:30-9 p.m. Remote



To register for a class, scan the QR code, visit [www.mchenry.edu/personaldevelopment](http://www.mchenry.edu/personaldevelopment), or call (815) 455-8588.



For more information, please contact the Community Enrichment Center at [personaldevelopment@mchenry.edu](mailto:personaldevelopment@mchenry.edu) or (815) 455-8758

# COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT CENTER

## SPRING 2026



## Varroa Mite: Know Your Enemy

Enemy #1 in the honeybee world is Varroa Destructor – the varroa mite. Understanding how the biology of the honeybee and that of the varroa mite intersect is important to successful beekeeping in today's world. This mite attaches to honeybees and their larva weakening them and passing on deadly viruses. A successful strategy for control of these mites is critical to the survival of a honeybee colony. This class will discuss the history, the biology and the control of Varroa Destructor.

## The Sweet Life: A Buzz-Worthy Look into the World of the Honey Bees

Join us for a delightful journey into the fascinating world of honey bees! We'll explore the secret lives of these industrious little creatures, uncovering how they create the delicious honey we all love. From the Queen Bee's royal duties to the amazing teamwork of the worker bees, we'll learn about their incredible communication, their vital role in our ecosystem, and simple ways we can help them thrive. This presentation is full of fun facts and amazing stories about bees.

## Buzzing Beauty: DIY Beeswax Lip Balm Workshop

Join us for a hands-on workshop where you'll learn to create your own natural lip balms using beeswax. Discover the benefits of beeswax and explore a variety of essential oils and natural ingredients to customize your balms. This workshop will cover the entire process, from melting and mixing to pouring and packaging, ensuring you leave with your own personalized lip balm to take home. Perfect for beginners and anyone interested in natural skincare, this fun and informative session will have you crafting your own lip care products in no time. All materials will be provided.

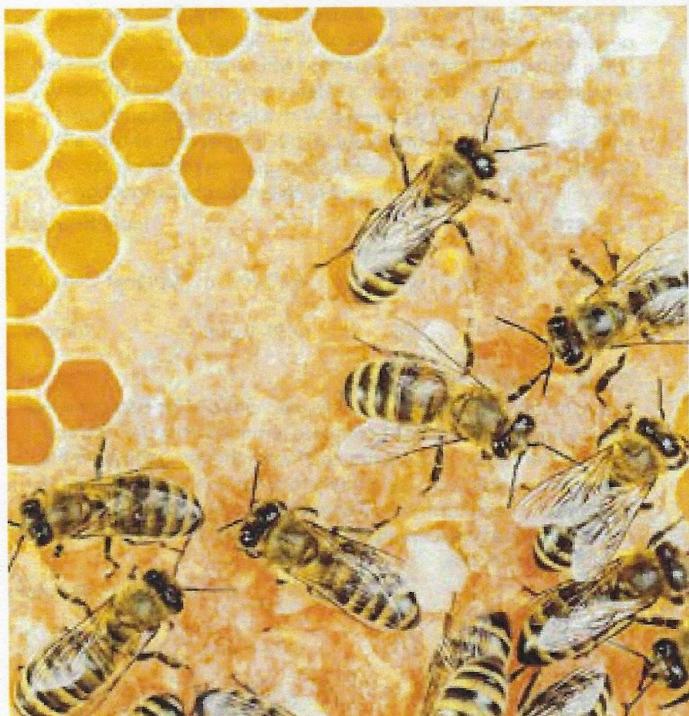
Coming soon: [Stephanie Slater](#)

## Honey Tasting: A Sensory Analysis of Honey

Honey takes a long journey before it lands in your jar. The final product can be affected by many variables, including the local climate, botanical sources and the honeybees who visit them, and the activity of beekeepers. In this class, we will study varietal honeys using our senses of sight, smell, taste, and touch to fully appreciate the selection of these honeys. We will approach honey tasting as a sensory journey as we review at least five varietal honeys and compare their flavors and profile differences. We will also review and discuss: a Honey Sensory Wheel and how that impacts fragrances within the honey; how to more finely tune our senses to appreciate our local varietals of honey; how honeys acquire certain aromas that often differ from what we would expect; methods of tasting the full balance of flavors of these honeys; how to appreciate the different textures of honey and their impact on our taste buds; and sample 20+ varieties of handcrafted local honeys (creamed, infused, raw, and barrel-aged) and other honey-based products (honey sauces, mustards, and honey hot sauces). Students will receive their own Honey Sensory Booklet for future tastings.

Coming soon.

Frank Moriarty



To register for a class, scan the QR code, visit [www.mchenry.edu/personaldevelopment](http://www.mchenry.edu/personaldevelopment), or call (815) 455-8588.

**For more information, please contact the Community Enrichment Center at [personaldevelopment@mchenry.edu](mailto:personaldevelopment@mchenry.edu) or (815) 455-8758**

# Chores of the Month – December 2025

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

John Leibinger

## What's happening in the hive?

The end of November and beginning of December sure came in snowy and cold! Quite a bit different from our weather last year. Not much that can be visually observed unless we have some additional warm days. For all intents and purposes and certainly from the bees' standpoint, winter is here.

The colony will now be broodless and the queen will likely be reproductively inactive until late January or early February.

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 relatively 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 hemolymph, but rather on fat bodies in bees). If you would like to read more about this topic see the link in the **General Info** section below.

## 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 sublimate 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 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 blowing off an outer cover or 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 2025 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 2026. Still no guarantee, but you have tilted the odds in their favor.

## Start preparing for the 2026 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 Inglis, Two Bees in a Podcast with Jamie Ellis, and YouTube videos by Ian Steppeler (The Canadian Beekeepers Blog), Kaman Reynolds, Bob Binnie, Fred Dunn, David Burns, 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 2025 season (and your notes) for successes and opportunities.

Think about new goals for 2026.

### **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)

Derek Mitchell on the outer mantel of the winter cluster as a heat sink rather than an insulation layer. The research paper is linked link near the end of the article. The whole of the research paper is a tough read so you may want to focus on the Abstract, Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusions sections.

[Research challenges beliefs on honeybee insulation](#) (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!***



## 2025 NIBA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

President – Tom Allen  
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 Webmaster – Terri Reeves  
 Newsletter Editor – Sue Pinkawa  
 Club Extractor Coordinator – Al Fullerton  
 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](mailto:adfhoney@gmail.com), if you don't get a timely response, just phone. Pick it up in Cary Illinois.

## The queen marking color for 2025 is Blue



## 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)