



SWEET STUFF

NIBA NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2026

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Tom Allen

Happy August, we've just finished the McHenry County Fair which sounds like it was a fun time! I want to thank so many people for stepping up in my absence to make sure the Fair was a success. Donna Taliaferro took control of the booth and how it was set up again this year and I've heard back from people who are NIBA members and people I know who attended the Fair that the booth looked spectacular! The display was very nice and showed a lot of beekeeping facts and items of interest to people who wanted to learn more about beekeeping. Honey tasting was a big hit again this year, Ralph Brindise was right when he said honey sales will increase if we let people taste the honey. Sue Pinkawa made sure the iPad was ready to track sales, that those working the booth had the sheets to use when a buyer wanted to use a charge card, that the honey had the appropriate price sticker on it and so many other things it would take pages to write it all. Jim Jellissen for the idea to make the t-shirts a tie dye design and Brandon Teresi for getting them printed in time for the Fair. Thank you to all of you who helped load and set up the booth (under Donna's watchful eye) and to those of you who helped tear the booth down and take everything back to the storage unit. A big thank you to all of you who volunteered to work the booth! I know several of you worked more than 1 shift because someone didn't sign up for a shift and rather than leaving the booth 1 person short you stepped up! Hopefully everyone who worked a shift made some new friends, learned something about beekeeping you didn't know before and you overcame your fear of talking to people you don't know. This was my first year since becoming a NIBA member that I didn't volunteer to work the booth and I missed it! I enjoy seeing the booth displays and the various jars of honey with the label design of the beekeeper who extracted it. I missed the faces of the kids as



they found the queen bee for the first time and the kids who already found her helping a younger kid find her. I enjoy walking the animal barns and watching them judge sheep or goats and wondering what makes a first place goat the best because he seems to act like he's a 10 year old boy who is just having fun doing what he wants to do which isn't standing still while the judge looks you over. I hope most of you got to spend some time walking the animal barns, trying the food out there on the midway or taking your kids or grandkids to the carnival!

As the summer comes to an end we think of what we need to do to get ready for the winter months. Mite counts and treatments, extracting the honey supers and feeding to name a few of the big things to do to make sure the colony is ready for the winter months. John usually has a great list of things to do in his monthly chore activities so follow that.

Willie Pankey and Jim Jellissen will be taking over the MCC hive maintenance. This will give them the responsibility to oversee the hives and do whatever is necessary to make the colony thrive. They will also coordinate what chores need to be done with the group who is doing a mentor session. If you want to help with mentor sessions please reach out to a board member.

Tom





Thank you to everyone that volunteered and participated at the McHenry County Fair and the Honey show. Without the people that step up and help, our club would have no representation at the show and so many people would not get to learn about bees and the many benefits the bees provide to everyone. A huge thank you to Donna Taliaferro for designing and setting up the NIBA booth. It is a HUGE undertaking and she did a bee-autiful 🐝 job! Next year we need someone or several people to step up and plan and design the booth for next year. Please consider undertaking this project. Donna would be happy to advise you. Another huge thank you to Cristy Bintz for being the Honey Superintendent at the fair. Organizing and running the competition with all the different categories takes a lot of skill and time. Everyone who participated enjoyed all the different categories offered including the black jar competition. Congratulations to all the winners and thank you to everyone that entered.

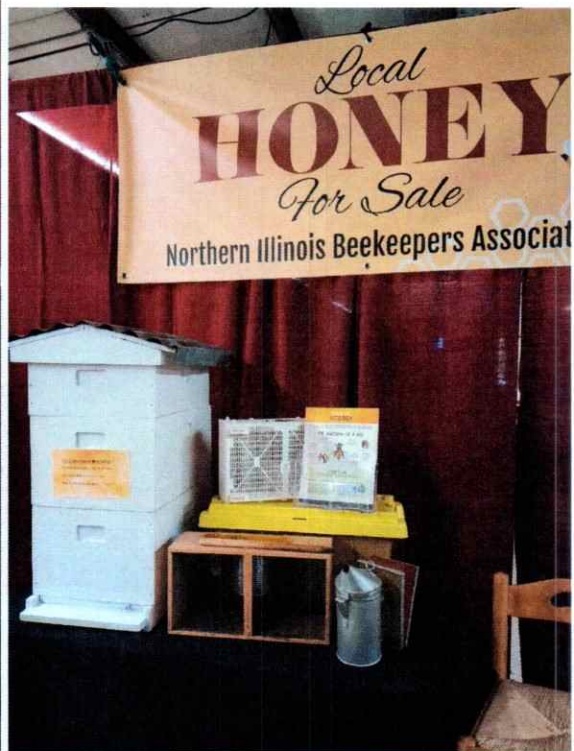


Pictures from the Fair













Greetings Beekeepers -

In the bee classes I teach at MCC, we talk about many aspects of keeping bees, but don't spend a lot of time on the subject of honey. Honey? Sure everyone knows what honey is. Bees make it. We enjoy it.

The reality is that honey is a complex subject. Recently, I asked an AI bot to answer the question "What is honey?" Here is what it replied.

So, What Exactly Is Honey?

A friendly look at a surprisingly tricky question for new beekeepers

Ask a room full of beekeepers, food inspectors, cooks, and honey judges to define honey, and you may get more discussion than you expected. At first it sounds simple: honey is the sweet stuff bees make. But the moment we try to turn that into a definition for selling, labeling, judging, or explaining it to customers, the edges get fuzzy.

A good working definition might be this: **Honey is the naturally sweet substance produced by bees from plant nectar or honeydew, changed by the bees, stored by**



them, and left with no added ingredients and no processing that fundamentally changes what it is.

- **Who made it?** Most legal definitions focus on honey bees, but beginners soon learn that the bee world is bigger than one species. That raises an obvious question: does honey have to come from honey bees, or can similar products from other bees count too?
- **Where did the sweetness start?** We usually think of honey as coming from flower nectar, but honeydew honey begins with secretions or excretions associated with plant-sucking insects. It is still gathered and transformed by bees, but it does not fit the simple “flower nectar” explanation.
- **Was anything added?** This is one of the clearest lines. If high fructose corn syrup, flavoring, or other sweeteners are added, most beekeepers would say it is no longer simply honey. It may be a honey product, but it should not be sold as plain honey.
- **Was anything important removed?** Filtering out wax bits is normal. But heavy filtering, overheating, or processing that removes or damages natural honey components can make people disagree about whether the product still represents honey as bees made it.
- **How much water is in it?** Moisture content is one of the most practical concerns for beginners because it affects storage and fermentation. Some standards use limits around 18% to 20%, and U.S. grading standards use moisture limits as part of quality grading. Still, real honey varies with weather, nectar source, region, and handling.

Why Moisture Gets So Much Attention

If you are new to beekeeping, moisture may sound like a small technical detail. It is not. Bees start with watery nectar and reduce that moisture as they ripen it into honey. When honey is dry enough, it stores very well. When it contains too much water, yeasts that occur naturally in honey may become active and fermentation can begin.

That is why beekeepers use refractometers, argue about numbers, and hesitate before extracting uncapped frames. Many books and standards point to familiar numbers such as 18%, 18.6%, or 20%. Those numbers are useful guideposts, but they are not magic buttons. Honey at a higher moisture level is more likely to ferment, but nectar source, yeast load, temperature, and storage conditions all matter.



Fermentation: Failure or Feature?

For table honey, fermentation is usually considered a quality problem. A jar that foams, pops, smells yeasty, or develops an alcoholic sharpness may surprise a customer who expected ordinary liquid honey. But fermentation itself is not mysterious. Mead is fermented honey by design, and many cooks intentionally ferment honey with ingredients such as garlic, peppers, ginger, lemon, or berries.

This is where beginners should separate two ideas: **honey for sale as honey** and **honey used as an ingredient in a fermented or infused food**. Both can be interesting. Both can be delicious. But they should not be labeled or handled as if they are the same thing.

So Is There a Best Definition?

There may not be one perfect definition for every situation. A food law definition needs measurable boundaries. A honey judge needs quality standards. A beekeeper needs practical guidance. A customer wants honesty: did bees make it, and has anything been added or changed?

For beginning beekeepers, the best everyday definition is probably simple and honest: honey is what bees make from nectar or honeydew, ripen, and store, without us adding sweeteners or processing it beyond recognition. After that, the details matter because they affect quality, safety, labeling, and customer trust.

A Beginner Beekeeper's Takeaway

If you are bottling honey from your first hives, do not get lost in the debate. Learn to check moisture. Harvest mostly capped frames. Avoid adding anything if you plan to sell it as plain honey. Do not overheat it. Label honestly. And remember that honey is wonderfully variable because bees, flowers, weather, and seasons are variable.

That is part of the fun. Honey is not just sugar in a jar. It is a bee-made food with local character, a little science, and enough complexity to keep beekeepers talking through many winter meetings.

This is a good introduction to honey. It is not a simple subject. Yet, as I extract my honey and spread it on my toast, I simply enjoy finding no need to deeply ponder the intricacies of this great gift from the bees. Bon appetite!

Larry



Chores of the Month – August – the dog days of summer

Like the bees we study, we accomplish more together.

John Leibinger

What's happening in the hive?

The colony population has peaked and will start to decline slightly later in the month. Nonetheless, you should be observing a fair number of bees and still see brood in all stages (BIAS) being raised to replace the older bees in the colony. These are likely the future nurse bees that will raise the winter bees (diutinous bees), so treat them well. The laying rate of the queen will be tapering off significantly from the rate that has been experienced in the spring and early summer. The rate of change is partially a factor of the race of bees that you have, but largely a function of declining resources as plant growth tapers off in the heat of summer. You may even experience a time when the queen seems to shut down laying altogether. Don't necessarily interpret this as a need for a new queen. This is all part of the annual cycle and is an element of 'normal'. Also, it is likely that some portion of the bees that will be raised later this month will be the start of the winter bees that will get the colony through until next spring.

You will likely see a lot of 'bearding' occurring on hot August evenings. I am sure most of you saw some of this in July during our heat wave. If you are a new beekeeper, don't panic, this is all part of the bees' thermoregulation process and is another element of 'normal'.

You may start to find your bees have developed some 'attitude' as we get into the month. Reduced resources often lead to robbing behaviors and if your colonies are on the wrong side of the thief-victim equation, they can start to be a bit defensive. The same behavior can be true when **you** are the 'thief' during harvesting.

Temperatures are heating up so ventilation and available water sources are 'must haves' for your bees.

The bee population is no longer expanding, but the Varroa mite ratio to bee population likely is. You must monitor their growth by doing regular mite checks (monthly sugar roll or alcohol wash, see below in General Info).

For All Beekeepers, it is time to:

Maintain the space around your hive(s). Your bees work hard at thermoregulation of the hive. Help them out. Trim weeds and grass to allow maximum air flow as the temperatures rise. Maintaining a clear flight path to the hive also helps with their foraging efficiency.

Provide additional ventilation to assist the bees in maintaining proper hive temperatures. This can be in the form of ventilated inner covers or as simple as propping the outer cover to allow more air circulation. The additional ventilation is also helpful in the conversion of nectar to honey. Better ventilation eases the job of moisture removal from the stored nectar. **With all this in mind, beware of potential robbing.**

Make sure the bees have a water source as we move into the heat of summer. Bees collect water to help cool the hive as part of their thermoregulation efforts. There are numerous ways to provide water. A quick internet search will provide some alternatives. I have been using Boardman feeders for providing water and I am amazed at how much water they utilize. (I use the feeders to mitigate the bees encroaching on neighbors and it seems to be work well).

Monitor for Varroa Mites monthly and take action if needed. The best place to start to make the decision on how to treat is to visit the updated Honeybee Health Coalition website and use their Tools for Varroa Management Guide and the Varroa Management Decision Tool. (See links in General Information section below.)(See General Info section below for references to mite checking procedures).

It is very important to get the mite loads under control now. The brood that will be raised as winter bees will be coming just around the corner. To maximize the strength of these winter bees, you need great nurse bees to raise them. These are the bees we are trying to protect now. Protect the bees that raise the winter bees. Come out of winter with healthy hives raring to go for 2027. This is a great step towards sustainable beekeeping.

Know what you have and keep records. Keep mite growth in check by utilizing a miticide, organic acids, drone comb culling, a combination of IPM methods, or a brood break. Pay attention to labeling instructions when using treatments and be mindful that you cannot leave honey supers on for all methods of treatments. The only treatments currently approved for use while honey supers are on are Hopguard 3, Formic Pro, VarroXSan (extended release Oxalic Acid), EZ-OX, and Api Bioxal (approved brand of oxalic acid dihydrate...multiple application methods available). Read the label for instructions on their use. Specifically be aware of temperature ranges for use. If you have already harvested your honey for the year, there are several other alternatives that have wider temperature ranges for use. Your specific approach will be influenced by your personal goals and philosophy, but, if you have a mite problem, doing nothing is not an acceptable answer if you want your colony to thrive and survive the winter.

Harvest honey appropriately. Don't overharvest, there are some lean weeks ahead for your bees. Be wary that the bees might be getting a bit defensive so dress accordingly. Do not be careless in your harvesting habits. Don't be sloppy



with burr comb that you scrape from the frames. Pick up those wax scraps which are often laden with honey. In lean times the bees, being the opportunists that they are, will jump at the chance to start robbing unprotected honey and sweet scrapes laying around. **You do not want to incite a robbing frenzy.** Do not leave frames of honey open in the bee yard or wherever you store them while awaiting extraction (extraction should occur as soon as you can arrange the time after removal from the hive). I have seen beekeepers lose many, many pounds (potentially all) of their honey by storing it in a garage that they thought was 'bee tight'. It happens remarkably fast. Prepare ahead.

Return freshly extracted frames or supers late in the day to reduce stimulating the robbing urge among your colonies. If you are not returning them to the hive for refilling, but rather storing for the winter, you should consider putting the super of wet frames back on the hive above the inner cover (regular inner cover, not a ventilated inner cover) and below the outer cover (some beekeepers add an empty super box (no frames) between the inner cover and the wet super). The benefit will be twofold. First, the bees will come up and remove all the remaining honey and store it in frames below the inner cover. Second, the bees will 'refurbish' the comb and leave it dry for storage. When you do go to store them, some sort of action to prevent wax moth infiltration may be appropriate. Though I have not experienced much of an issue with wax moth in supers that have never had brood in them, the general recommendations are that you store frames with paradichlorobenzene (PDB) crystals (**Do Not Use Moth Balls or Moth Crystals Containing Napthalene**), spray them with a product called Certan (a Bacillus Thuringiensis based product), or freeze the frames to kill any moth eggs/larva and secure in an airtight (moth tight) container. There has been some research to indicate that PDB may get absorbed a bit by the wax, so do your homework and decide on your path. Before reusing these supers next year, you will need to air them out for several days to a week to dissipate the PDB odor.

Be very aware of robbing. It happens quickly and can be devastating. Reduce entrance openings to the smallest size on your entrance reducers, or alternately, install robbing screens. If you do not use screened bottom boards, it may be advantageous to use the robbing screens instead of the significant reduction in reducer opening during the extreme heat so that you can maintain maximum ventilation. There are many types of robbing screens, some very simple and some a bit more 'inventive'. Check the internet for robbing screens and you will get an abundance of ideas. You will have to use your judgement on the direction you take.

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. 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. 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.

Monitor the hives for queen signs. Stuff happens....the queen may be failing and the bees need to replace her. She may have died for some reason. Don't allow your hive to remain queen-less. Doing so will likely lead to a 'laying worker' condition. This is a problem that is not easily resolved and oftentimes results in the death of the colony. You need to know that they have the resources to make a new queen or you will have to provide those resources from another colony. Alternately, you can buy and install a queen, though, as you get late in the season, queen availability may be reduced.. Going into fall/winter with a healthy hive and a young queen are key elements to successful over-wintering and sustainable beekeeping. Stay ahead of problems and take action when needed.

Return extracted frames to the hives for them to continue to make more honey if you want. There is still a potential fall flow from goldenrod, asters, and other late blooming plants. If you are not interested in harvesting the fall flow, consider starting your winter feeding now (once you have removed your honey crop from spring/summer). Feeding 2:1 sugar to water is 'traditional'. This has the benefit of allowing additional time for winter stores buildup. Some beekeepers utilize a thinner 1:1 syrup with the thought that it will stimulate more brood rearing and lead to raising more winter bees. Might be worth considering trying some each way and evaluate the results.

Consider making splits or nucs to raise additional bees for next year if this is part of your goal plan. Regardless of your goal plan, this is a great step towards sustainable beekeeping. There are different thoughts on the timing of this, but in any case do not delay or you can pass for 2026 and plan better in 2027.

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)

[Varroa Management Decision Tool](#) (Ctrl+Click link)

Sugar Roll Method: [varroa mite monitoring - The Sand Hill](#) (Ctrl+Click link)



Alcohol Wash Method: [Alcohol Wash for Mite Control - YouTube](#) (Ctrl+Click link)



Extreme Robbing



Simple Robbing Screen



Another Robbing Screen





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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!
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

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 John Dolsen by phone or text at 630-217-0778 or email john5232@sbcglobal.net, if you don't get a timely response, just phone. Pick it up in Marengo, Illinois.

The queen marking color for 2026 is White

