

DECEMBER 2023

MCBA NEWSLETTER

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION



NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

REGINA RHOA

Two days ago, it felt like father winter has finally come early, but as I write this today, it is 52F and this weekend it is forecasted to be 61F. From what I heard, the Farmer's Almanac is predicting a colder winter and more snowfall. I am not sure if I believe in the almanac or in Punxsutawney Phil since I am not sure how accurate they may be. The weather forecaster can't even get the weather right a day in advance. A study at University of Illinois said the Almanac is accurate about 50% of the time. Ha, so don't take any bets if you want to lose half the time. But that being said, beekeepers should always be prepared.

I normally put winter wraps on each year. I figure it is like a multi vitamin, it is good insurance. Last year I ran out of wraps and ran out to Lowes and bought some Reflectix. Of course, I got busy and never got around to wrapping two of my nucleus colonies. They did just fine and came out of winter with booming clusters. Granted last winter was a mild, but we never know. This year, I am behind again and still haven't got the wraps installed. When I had less than 15 colonies, it seems like the prudent thing to do, but now that I have 32 and out yards, it is more work and more things to store away. So, this year I am going to install the wraps on half my hives and have a better data set to make decisions from. So, do you need them? Not sure. Some people say it makes a difference, others say that the bees think it is warmer outside and break cluster too soon. I think the most important thing to do for our bees going into winter is: low mite counts, large enough clusters, no excessive moisture, and a good wind break. I will let you know next spring how it went.

Also, this is my third winter NOT running upper entrances. I also use a thick insulation board inside my outer covers which I leave on all year long (see article from last month). I think this makes more of a difference than hive wraps. The insulation prevents extra moisture from collecting on the top cover, but instead the moisture drips down the side of the hives where the bees can collect it. I also use screened bottom boards with inserts so I don't have to worry about extra moisture collecting on the bottom boards, thus I don't tilt my hives with a shim.

I think the bottom line is that there is no one way to keep bees. Listen to everyone and try things out for yourself. Location makes a difference also. If you are in a low-lying valley, warm sunny field with no wind break or a south facing wall, you will get different results. Don't be afraid to try things out yourself and make your own decisions.

THIS ISSUE:

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT
PAGE 01

BANQUET RECAP
PAGE 02

ANNOUNCEMENTS/EVENTS
PAGE 03

MCBA WEBSITE
PAGE 04

PSU HPDL (POLLEN ID)
PAGE 05

COOKIN' WITH... WAX?
PAGE 06

BEGINNERS' CORNER
PAGE 07

MEET THE BOARD
PAGE 08

BANQUET RECAP

A huge thank you to all who participated in this year's Fall Banquet! The event was a success as always, and we are grateful for all the attendees who came out to share some stories and laughs.

Like every year, there are two groups that deserve major shout-outs: the Banquet Committee and our event Sponsors. Without you, the banquet doesn't happen. Thank you so much for all the time, effort, and support!

Banquet Committee

Judy Balock (chair)	Marilyn Hibbard
George Balock	David Hibbard
Kelly Downs	Charlene Hilt
Wayne Downs	Chris Jefferson
Jeanne Gable	Kara Lehman

Gold Sponsor

BeeWorks, LLC

2024 package/nuc order forms and info now available!

Additional Sponsors

AAA Catering (Chef Chipper)

Dadant and Sons

Balock Woodturning

Ernst Seeds

Bee Club Sales

Forest & Main Brewing Company

Bee Culture

Holy Protection Monestary

Behmerwald Nursery

Kara Jo Skincare & Bee Farm

Betterbee

Pierco Beekeeping Equipment

Byers Choice

Dr. Thomas Seeley

ANNOUNCEMENTS/EVENTS

2024 New Beekeepers' Class

First thing's first - congratulations to the 2023 Beginners class participants and instructors on a successful year!

We are excited to welcome back Kelly Downs and Jeanne Gable for another year of top-notch instruction. Registration is now OPEN!

If you are brand new to beekeeping or if you have struggled for one reason or another, this class will give you the foundation you need to find success. Keeping bees is a steep learning curve, so do yourselves a favor and consider signing up!

Click [HERE](#) for more details and registration info.

General Meetings

General meetings for 2023 have concluded. We look forward to seeing you all at next year's meetings with another great program of speakers set for 2024.

First talk of the year:

January 25 (7:00PM)

Dr. Kaira Wagoner - Hygienic Behavior - A Sustainable Solution to the Honey bee Health Crisis

MCBA Survey

The MCBA is always looking for ways to improve. In the coming days, you should receive a year-end survey by email. Please take the time to participate, as your feedback will help steer the ship for 2024 and beyond.

2024 Special Interest Classes

Be on the lookout for a series of special interest class announcements for 2024. Once details are finalized you should receive an email with more information, or you can periodically check in on our website's "Events" page

MCBA WEBSITE

www.montcopabees.org

Hopefully you are all familiar with our MCBA website, but if not, please visit by clicking [HERE](#) (or entering the link above) and take a look around. A lot of effort goes into keeping the website updated with tons of great information (**huge thanks to Kelly Downs, our website manager**). Below is not a comprehensive list, but here are a few quick links to some of the key pages on the site:

Events

Event information is always posted well in advance of the event date itself. While it may take some time to fill out all relevant details, be sure to visit the events page regularly to mark your calendars for General Meetings, Classes (beginners and special interest), picnic/banquet, or even our monthly board meetings.

Services & Resources - Swarm Control

The relevance of this page seems distant right now, but the 2024 swarm season will be on us before we know it. This page lists beekeepers/businesses that can catch swarms or perform cutouts (if specified) by county. Please be aware that cutouts in particular require specific expertise and should generally be performed by licensed and insured contractors. Do your best to gather relevant details before contacting these folks, as swarm season is a busy time of year for everyone. A few questions to ask yourself: are you certain they are honey bees? do you have pictures available? what is the approximate height of the swarm cluster? are you the property owner and if not, does the beekeeper have access?

Store/4 Sale - Honey and Bees for Sale From Our Members

Looking for local honey and/or bees? Have honey or bees (nucs/queens) for sale? This is a great place to look. If you have honey or bees for sale and are not currently listed, please reach out to us with information and we will be sure to add you.

Please note that the MCBA strongly advocates for participation in our state inspection program. However, MCBA is not responsible for ensuring sellers of bees/queens are licensed and inspected. Be sure to ask questions you deem important to your operation directly to the seller up front.

PENN STATE HONEY AND POLLEN DIAGNOSTIC LAB

One question I'm certain *every* beekeeper has pondered: what kind of pollen is that? Throughout the season, I am always curious what is being foraged upon locally, and in what proportions. It may not necessarily guide our actions in the apiary, but it is at minimum very interesting and could certainly help shed light on forage availability from bee yard to bee yard.

Good news: Penn State's Honey and Pollen Diagnostic Lab (PSU HPDL) is accepting samples to detect individual pollen at the genus level and relative proportions in pollen and honey samples! The following message was sent to MCBA by Dr. Christina Grozinger of the PSU HPDL:

“The Penn State Honey and Pollen Diagnostic Lab (PSU HPDL) is pleased to announce that we are now accepting honey and pollen samples for our pollen identification service!

The HPDL uses DNA metabarcoding to identify pollen in samples. This service identifies what plants (identification at genus level) are in a honey or pollen sample and the proportion of each of the total pollen in the sample.

After the sample is processed, you will receive a report with the scientific name, common name representative of the genus, and the proportion it was present in the sample. For example, a spring sample might look something like this: 25% Acer/Maple, 25% Cercis/Redbud and 50% Trifolium/White clover. If you need these data for a scientific study, the HPDL can provide you with the raw or processed sequencing data.

Please see our [website](#) for more details about pollen identification and our upcoming service for 2024 - spotted lanternfly identification in honey. Please contact Dr. Michele Mansfield man203@psu.edu for any questions or for additional sample submission information. More details about the Penn State Center for Pollinator Research can be found at pollinators.psu.edu “

COOKIN' WITH... WAX?

Every year I struggle to come up with the ideal Christmas gift for my wife. Since she loves to cook/bake, I usually end up right back in the kitchen, and this year was no different: a traditional carbon steel paella pan.

Just like cast iron, carbon steel is susceptible to rust and needs some routine maintenance over its life. With this gift in mind, and with a handful of other cast iron that could use some TLC, I began searching for some good seasoning oil/oil combinations and found what I think is a real winner: grapeseed oil + beeswax. This is likely to be the simplest recipe I will ever share, but is a great use for some of that beautiful golden wax.

Ingredients:

Grapeseed oil, beeswax



Directions:

*Over low heat or in a double boiler, combine 4 parts grapeseed oil (by weight) with 1 part beeswax. I used 80 grams oil + 20 grams wax (enough for 2 pucks).

Once combined, carefully pour into silicone mold or mason jar for easy storage

Use:

Wax will cause the mixture to solidify as it cools. The combination can be easily cut or spooned out of container and added to a clean, warmed cast iron pan to melt (or spread directly as a seasoning puck). Using a paper towel or rag, carefully spread the melted oil/wax around entire pan (and removing excess) for a protective, nonstick surface!

Why grapeseed oil?

In short, grapeseed oil is a popular choice for cast iron seasoning as it is high in polyunsaturated fats. This means it will more readily oxidize and form polymerized chains resulting in a better layer around the cast iron/carbon steel. It also boasts a relatively high smoke point and relatively low price point compared to some other oils.

But by no means is grapeseed the only choice - feel free to experiment and find a combination that works for you!

<https://heartscontentfarmhouse.com/cast-iron-seasoning-oil/>

*As beeswax is flammable at high temperatures, be sure to watch pan/pot carefully.
Mixture combines fairly quickly

From Beginner to Beginner+

Hello again, fellow beginner beekeepers! Go ahead and take a moment to reflect on your (first?) season keeping bees and/or just making it through the MCBA New Beekeepers class. Quite the whirlwind, right? As you surely know by now, we weren't kidding when we said beekeeping is a steep learning curve! There is so much to learn, much of which you have to learn quickly if you decided to keep bees for the first time in tandem with taking the class. But, even if you experienced some setbacks or failures, you have much to be proud of and I hope you are taking some excitement and a positive outlook into 2024!

This month, I wanted to offer a fairly basic bit of advice on how to graduate from a "beginner" to what I am referring to as a "beginner+". So... what do I mean by "beginner+"?

In 2020 I took the beginners class, at the time taught by Mark Antunes. As I prepare to enter my fifth year keeping bees, I still consider myself a beginner. The point being, it seems like this hobby is an endless quest for knowledge. We are constantly looking for new methods or approaches to enhance our skills and improve our apiaries. Even the experts both in commercial business and in academia are on this path! I remember the whirlwind that was my first year. There was so much material coming at me that I basically used only 3 resources to get by: Mark and the beginners' class, my mentors when things went awry, and the "trial by fire" of my apiary itself. I didn't feel I had the time, energy, or mental capacity to seek much information elsewhere.

The transition from "beginner" to "beginner+" is marked by a sense of comfortability. You will begin to find rhythm as you work your colonies. You will start to see the frames more clearly: assessing adult health, brood patterns, and queen spotting. Anxiety (hopefully that was never too high to begin with) will be replaced with excitement. And suddenly, the things you learned in your first year or two will begin naturally falling into place. With the hurricane of information and initial applied learning behind you, your mind will open to more complex elements of beekeeping. You've gotten the basics down, and it's time to seek out some additional resources.

So, where to begin? I didn't start attending our club's General Meetings until my second year. PLEASE consider checking these sessions out. Our general meeting committee does a tremendous job securing speakers at the top of the field from all over the country (and even internationally) and present terrific opportunities for learning about focused topics. Keep an eye out for the special interest classes - these classes have replaced the Intermediate course, but are wildly helpful and timely (details on these coming soon). READ! There is too much material to recommend in detail here, but one good book for the winter is *Swarm Essentials* by Stephen Repasky. The topic of 'swarming' is very important, especially for those emerging with bees out of their first winter. PODCASTS! Many to choose from, but one of my favorites is "Two Bees in a Podcast." Hosted by Dr. Jamie Ellis from UF (a previous general meeting speaker), Dr. Ellis and his co-host break down a TON of topics in a fun, easily digested manner.

In summary, don't expect to have all the answers in your second or third year. I'm a 5th year beginner, and I suspect I may yet consider myself a beginner even at year 10. There are plenty of lessons on the way. But to get the most enjoyment and success out of keeping bees, do your best to earn the "+" by staying thirsty for apicultural knowledge!

MEET THE BOARD

2023 MCBA Board of Directors

Officers

*President - Regina Rhoa

*Vice President - vacant

Secretary - Melissa Shainline

Treasurer - Melissa Natale

General

Vince Aloyo

George Balock

Robert Brooks

Bob “Buzz” Buswick

Kelly Downs

Scott Famous

Jeanne Gable

Derek Pruyne

*Past President - Greg Lehman

Note to all MCBA members: the board holds monthly meetings that can be found on our Events page [HERE](#). Members are always welcome to join these meetings to share thoughts/ideas, or to simply observe the inner-workings of the club.

*Effective 11/1/2023, the role of MCBA President was assumed by former Vice President Regina Rhoa, and Greg Lehman is now serving as Past President. The next newsletter will reflect the 2023 elections (concluded in October) and updated officer positions.

Montgomery County Beekeepers' Association of Pennsylvania (MCBAPA) is a 501(c)3 non profit organization located in Montgomery County, PA. Our membership consists of individuals who are both commercial and hobby beekeepers. The MCBAPA encourages and promotes active involvement within our community and our organization. Membership is open to an individual who is a beekeeper or has an interest in beekeeping, and who wants to promote honeybee health.

Our Mission: Providing educational outreach to the public, supporting fellow beekeepers and working to promote sound beekeeping practices and honeybee health.