



# THE HONEY POT

MONTGOMERY COUNTY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Apr 8, 7:00pm

### **MCBA Monthly Meeting**

Brookside Nature Center

Dr Jay Evans, USDA Bee Lab

*Honey Bees, Up with the Good*

May 13, 7:00pm

### **MCBA Monthly Meeting**

Brookside Nature Center

Bart Smith, USDA Bee Lab

*Lab Diagnostics for Beekeepers*

May 17, 7:00pm

### **Club Barbecue**

Brookside Nature Center

June 10, 7:00pm

### **MCBA Monthly Meeting**

Brookside Nature Center

Marie Rojas, Master Gardener

*Brookside Plant Tour*

July 8, 7:00pm

### **MCBA Monthly Meeting**

Brookside Nature Center

Charles Walter

*Breeding Russian Queens*

August

**No meeting, MoCo Ag Fair**

Sept 9, 7:00pm

### **MCBA Monthly Meeting**

Brookside Nature Center

Dr Marian Frasier, Penn State

## *Message from the President*

by Timothy McMahon

### *To Treat or Not to Treat, That is the Question!*

With this article, I don't want to start an argument about what is right or what is wrong. I just want to put down in words the progression I went through as a beekeeper with my dealings with Varroa mites. If you choose to use chemical treatments or refuse to use chemical treatments, I'm OK with both choices. This article is about my decisions and I'm 100% OK with anyone who has made a different decision for any reason. Most of the beekeepers in Montgomery County are backyard hobbyist type beekeepers. As such, a high percentage of us choose not to treat our bees with any chemicals and I wish I could still be in that category. There are clearly many pros and cons of each treatment type as there are pros and cons of not treating your bees. This article will not go into the detailed pros and cons of each specific treatment type.

Starting out as that hobbyist beekeeper, I did not want to use any chemicals on my bees or hive (other than Paramoth for the stored comb). As a first time beekeeper, I wanted to go



with the mantra of “live and let die” and try to help the bees find their own middle grounds with Varroa mites. My first year, I had two hives started from nucs, one even swarmed in June. Both of these two hives made it through the first winter without any mite treatments and I added two more hives, also started from nucs. My second year I had four healthy hives go into the winter and all four came out, still without any mite treatments. My third year, I added five more hives in an out apiary started with packages. I went into my third winter with nine healthy colonies and still had not done any Varroa mite treatments. All nine of these colonies came out of that third winter without any problems. At this point, I was in my fourth year with no losses ever and no Varroa mite treatments ever, and I was sure that I was a great beekeeper. That fourth year I started three more hives from packages, for a total of 12 colonies. Now feeling really good about myself, I launched into a plan to make my own nucs from my colonies after the nectar flow ended.

So there I was at the beginning of July with a total of 20 colonies. Now is where I find out that a little bit of knowledge can be very dangerous. Without going into the whole story, let me just say that my first try at making nucs did not go well. Not really having the experience needed or a clear plan, I made a complete mess of things. I came home one day to a sight I hope none of you ever have to see as a beekeeper. The robbing situation was

beyond repair. I’m just glad none of my neighbors actually saw what was happening in my back yard, even I was afraid of the “situation”. So I went into my fourth winter with 13 colonies, still never having done a Varroa mite treatment, and without a colony loss due to mites (the only losses were due to my lack of skill at making nucs and managing my apiary for robbing).



Now we get to the not-so-good part. During my fourth winter, I lost 11 out of my 13 hives. I was beside myself. I took samples of bees and comb up to the Beltsville Bee Lab and it all tested negative for Nosema, tracheal mites and American Foulbrood. Bart Smith, from the USDA Bee Lab, said, in a manner that he must have told

thousands of beekeepers before, that it was most likely Varroa mites and the viruses that they vector. So in my fifth year, starting over with 2 overwintered hives and 13 more starting from packages, I swore that things would be different. I decided to try some of the less intrusive Varroa mite IPM treatments. I added some drone brood frames in the spring and took the time to watch them fill up and then I froze the frames when they were mostly filled with capped drone brood. Then also in that fifth year I used the food grade beta acid treatment called Hopguard in the month of

August. So three times in August I was out in my yards dealing with those yucky Hopguard strips. I did one combine before the winter starts, but I believe I’m taking 14 healthy hives into the winter. Once again I’m shown how little I know and come to the worst possible outcome. I lose

all 14 hives. Again the Beltsville Bee Lab tells me that Varroa mites mostly likely got them. I’ve now gone from the best beekeeper of all times to the worst beekeeper of all time. Not being shy about telling my story to people, I have had several people note that the Bee Informed Partnership data

## *During my fourth winter, I lost 11 out of my 13 hives.*

also shows that the Hopguard treatments do not show very favorable results (this was the old Hopguard, there is a new Hopguard product out there now that I've not tried yet).

So now after two winters of terrible results, I'm ready to try almost anything to keep at least some of my bees alive. I order up 16 more packages and before I even install them, I spray them with an oxalic acid sugar water spray using the method outlined and approved by the Canadian government. Then last summer, in August, I treat the 16 hives with Mite Away Quick Strips (MAQS, a formic acid treatment). As the fall of 2014 sets in, I combine some of my weak hives and take 13 colonies into the winter. Just after the New Year, I apply an oxalic acid vapor treatment to the hives. Things are looking good until February shows up and we end up with four plus weeks of single digit temps almost every day. Now that the flowers are starting to bloom, I've got 11 out of the 13 hives through the winter. These are the kind of numbers I was hoping for. I still can't say that my treatments are what made a difference here, but it backs up what Prof. Dennis van Engeldorp's group show at the Bee Informed Partnership. Using the data from the Bee Informed Partnership you see that beekeepers who do not do treatments suffer about 40% losses each winter but those that are applying multiple Varroa treatments a year (mostly commercial beekeepers) are seeing about 20% losses each winter. The way Dennis van Engeldorp puts this is that in the field of epidemiology if you could show a 50% drop in the mortality rate of cancer with a specific treatment, as we are seeing with the Varroa treatments on honey bees, you would be able to claim a cure for cancer! A 50% drop in hive losses should make one stop and think about the pros and cons of treating for Varroa mites. Looking at the data gathered by the Bee Informed Partnership and what has been published in the scientific journals, it

seems clear to me that using treatments, such as those mentioned above, is the only way to see better results in survival of over wintered colonies. Clearly the issues facing our beloved bees is very complicated and full of variables (such as lose of quality forage, excessive use of pesticides in our environment, and the added stresses of the way we keep our bees and the way in which we use monoculture). There are no silver bullets in the fight against Varroa mites. Using hygienic bees, using drone brood removal, using Russian bees, using small cells or screened bottom boards will not stop you from losing large numbers of colonies to the Varroa mites. Again, please don't get me wrong. If you don't want to use treatments on your hives I'm OK with your decision. I'm not saying you are wrong for not using treatments, I'm just pointing out that I've come to a different decision on how to handle this persistent issue of the Varroa mite. When all is said and done, I wish I did not have to do these things to keep my bees alive and I look forward to the day, hopefully, that I no longer need to apply such treatments. Best of luck to all in dealing with the very nasty Varroa mite.

(\        (\  
 {|||8-    {|||8-  
 (/        (/

## Honey Bee Power Plants

by Marie Rojas



### *Flowering Quince - Chaenomeles speciosa*

Your grandmother probably had a flowering quince in her yard. They were popular cottage garden plants back in the day.

Turns out Grandma was right – flowering quince are top-notch for honey bees. Mine is positively “a buzz” in April when it blooms!



‘Toyo-Nishiki’, is a strong, upright grower 8’ high and wide.

- ✦ Dense, thorny shrub, 6-10’.
- ✦ Blooms for 2-3 weeks in April.
- ✦ 3 star nectar source and 2 star pollen source for honey bees; bumble bees will also visit.
- ✦ Sun to part shade, drought tolerant, adaptable to a wide range of soil types.
- ✦ Renewal prune by cutting the oldest branches to the ground after flowering. You can also cut the entire shrub down to within 6” of the ground if it’s getting out of bounds.



## *Letter from the South*

by Bill Miller

In a nutshell, warm weather has come, my locust trees are in bloom, and the swarms are coming thick and furious. I've had several swarms myself, and have used them to bring back my colony count to normal levels. I could have gotten many swarms from around the area, but unfortunately most of the swarm calls come while I am at work.

I'm not the only one in the Wiregrass Beekeepers who has a day job, and I daresay many of the Montgomery County beekeepers also have day jobs. Like most beekeeping clubs, we publish a swarm catchers list on our Club website, and we have found this list lacks an important bit of information: what times individuals are available to catch swarms. You might want to include that information on the Montgomery County Beekeepers Association's swarm catchers list.

Sometimes, swarms will come to you. I set up a hive at my Plant Farley apiary so as to be ready in case a swarm was found at the plant. Well, when I went by the apiary today, I found many bees were in the process of checking that hive out – way too many to be there just by chance. I daresay those bees were the advance party from a swarm someplace else on the plant property, and while the swarm hadn't moved in yet to set up shop, my hive was definitely on their short list of places to live. I'll find out in the next day or so if they have moved in. Incidentally, my check tomorrow will be by seeing if the population of bees flying in and out of the hive has increased – I don't like to open a hive with a freshly hived swarm for a week to make sure the bees are well settled into their new home.

This leads into a technique for getting swarms out of awkward places. Get yourself a copy paper box, and cut a hole in it about 1 square inch. Put in a swarm lure and locate the box just upwind of the swarm and come back the next day. I won't promise this will work every time, but a respected beekeeper down here claims an 80% success rate with this technique.

In other beekeeping news, I have supers on my production colonies, but the bees haven't begun to fill them yet. These first supers are all drawn comb and I don't use queen excluders, so the bees can use these supers for extra brood rearing space now (a form of swarm prevention) and later they will fill them with honey when the nectar flow gets going. So for now I will wait for the nectar flow to start. It should be on by the time May rolls around and you hear from me again. Until then, keep up your swarm prevention measures and get your supers ready.

<b><u><a href="http://www.MontgomeryCountyBeekeepers.com">www.MontgomeryCountyBeekeepers.com</a></u></b>		
President	Timothy McMahon	<a href="mailto:TimMcMahonBeekeeper@gmail.com">TimMcMahonBeekeeper@gmail.com</a>
Vice President	Jim Fraser	<a href="mailto:JFraser71@aol.com">JFraser71@aol.com</a>
Secretary	Tracy Waterman	<a href="mailto:tracyjbw@me.com">tracyjbw@me.com</a>
Treasurer	Jim King	<a href="mailto:JasKing.us@verizon.net">JasKing.us@verizon.net</a>
Webmaster	Chris Ianculescu	<a href="mailto:Ianculescu.Cristian@gmail.com">Ianculescu.Cristian@gmail.com</a>
Newsletter Editor	Dara Ballow-Giffen	<a href="mailto:InTheComb@gmail.com">InTheComb@gmail.com</a>
ListServ Moderator	George Meyer	<a href="mailto:BeeGeorgeHoney@hotmail.com">BeeGeorgeHoney@hotmail.com</a>
Honey Extractor Contacts	Frank McGowan Leon Vandenberg	<a href="mailto:mrfikser@verizon.net">mrfikser@verizon.net</a> <a href="mailto:l.vandenberg@verizon.net">l.vandenberg@verizon.net</a>
Outreach Materials Contact	Mary McQueen	<a href="mailto:MaryKMcQueen@gmail.com">MaryKMcQueen@gmail.com</a>