

Skagit Valley Beekeepers



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Through The Tunnel

I'm always pleased to get through the shortest day of the year and to know that each day is a little longer and the warmer months within sight, even if we still have a ways to go.

There's not much beekeeping to be done in January. Just some quick check ups, clearing entrances, making sure the bees have food. January does allow us some time to catch up on those neglected magazine issues we didn't have time for during the busy months. Books too. I recently read *Better Beekeeping: The Ultimate Guide to Keeping Stronger Colonies and Healthier, More Productive Bees* by **Kim Flottum** and an easy reader that I picked up at the local library called *The Hive Detectives: Chronicle of a Honey Bee Catastrophe* by **Loree Griffin Burns** and **Ellen Harasimowicz**.

What bee books have you been reading? I'm always interested in something new.

The next meeting will be **January 14th, 2015 at 7:00 PM** at the Skagit Farmers Supply CENEX Administration building, located at 1833 Park Avenue, Burlington WA. Our **Seth Smith** will be talking about nuc orders, supply orders, mite treatments, spring management and late winter management.

Dues are due! Talk with **Scott Rhodes** at the meeting to pay those dues.

Happy New Year!

Winter Feeding

Hopefully you left enough honey on your hives that the bees can feed themselves the honey they collected.

Sometimes though, for one reason or another their honey isn't enough and you need to supplement their honey with

something else.

The last few years, I've been doing the Mountain Camp Style of feeding bees in the winter. On the top bars, lay a sheet of newspaper, cut a few slits with your hive tool, spritz the newspaper with sugar water and then spread out a 4 pound bag of dry regular plain ol' sugar. I usually spritz the sugar again with sugar water.

It worked great, the bees seemed to have used it but if I ever needed to get into the hive, it was a pain to remove all that sugar and replace it.

Others make a bee fondant or bee candy which is an easy and exceptional winter feed for the bees and our Brad Raspet has a good recipe for how to make it on the SVBA website at: <http://goo.gl/uTZyryz>

This year I tried Mann Lake's Winter patties. I didn't quite like them. A couple hives ate them, others just let them sit there. They're moist and a bit gooey. I'm sure they're OK but I really didn't like them.

Later this year, I was reading **Lauri Miller's** Facebook page, she's a good beekeeper down in Roy, Washington and how she feeds her bees in the winter is with these bee blocks that she makes. Like huge sugar cubes, I tried them out and they're quite easy to make, especially in 4 pound batches.

The bees like them (as far as I can tell) and they are **easy to make** and no baking or boiling involved. I love that part!

To make a 4 pound batch, pour **4 pounds of sugar** into a large bowl. Optionally sprinkle in **1/8 teaspoon of Durvet's Vitamins & Electrolytes** (Skagit Farmers has this in their stores) and mix in with the sugar.

Now add **5 ounces of apple cider vinegar** (not apple cider *flavored* vinegar but real apple cider vinegar).

Mix this all up well and then spoon out into a shallow aluminum baking sheet. Flatten and lightly compress the sugar with a rolling pin and then using a knife or something similar, cut into 4 blocks.

You have to section your blocks now because this sugar mixture will harden. Now let this pan sit for a few hours to a few days, it will harden and then can be simply and quickly slid onto the top bars of a hive.

As for the vitamins and electrolytes, that is optional but Lauri has been using them for years.

If I remember, I add a couple drops of Lemon Grass essential oil to the vinegar before mixing into the sugar.

Lauri Miller's recipe can be found at: <https://goo.gl/3OhftM>

Things To Do This Month

- If the weather warms up enough, you might consider popping a lid or two to see how your bees are doing. Queens could be starting to lay. There's a lot of talk about winter treatments against varroa mites. If you treat, do so before the queen starts laying.
- Quickly clean dead bees off the bottom board. We want to make sure the live ones can get out of the hive when they need to and no bees are blocking the entrance.
- Lift the back of the hives to check their stores. It needs to be hefty or you might want to consider feeding. If you need to feed, use dry sugar, a fondant, sugar bricks or other non-liquid feed.
- The bees need to be dry. They can deal with the cold but wet is a killer.
- Check and or clean your woodenware and other equipment, build or order those hive parts that need replacing. It's also a great time to clean that burnt gunk out of your smoker.
- Consider ordering new queens, packages of bees or nucs (Seth will be talking about this at the meeting!).
- Catch up on your bee magazines and read books about bees and beekeeping.

1984

I have a collection of the old SVBA newsletters and sometime I like to pour over them to find items of interest. The January 1984 newsletter mentioned **Roy Thurber** from Kirkland, WA as their guest speaker that month.

His presentation was "Basic Beekeeping" and "Why Beekeepers Go Broke". Roy also brought slides (**slides**: (n) transparent things with images on them and typically placed in a projector where the image can be projected onto a screen for group viewings).

The newsletter stated that the slides "*will be shown on the Varroa mite, the worst bee parasite that has spread throughout the world with the exception of the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We don't need them here - that's for sure, so listen good.*"

Can you imagine a period without Varroa? Wouldn't that have been nice.

Apparently they were having problems with American Foul Brood. Not sure which scare me the most, AFB or Varroa. I think AFB. Varroa don't make me burn all the equipment.

On the plus side, they had an extraordinary honey harvest back in 1984 and that they "*will long remember this year for super yields after a slow wet start in the dandelion and maple. The hot weather brought on a blackberry flow that lasted into August. The fireweed, huckleberry, and thistle have been excellent. Beekeepers will compare honey flows with 1984 for a long time.*" The August 1984 newsletter mentions 1963 as their last "*huge honey flow year.*"

