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NEIBA NEWS



PREPARING FOR WINTER

INCREASING THE ODDS OF COLONY SURVIVAL

Beekeepers sometimes joke that Indiana has only two seasons: winter and the Fourth of July.

Midsummer is long gone, most of the season’s honey has been harvested, and now all thoughts turn toward preparing our hives for the inevitable cold weather ahead. It’s a time for evaluating what has worked in the past, discussing options with other beekeepers, and getting an early start on readying our apiaries for winter.

In this issue, experienced beekeeper Dean Gerber shares the outcomes of several winterization experiments he has conducted over the years. (See page 3.) We’ll be posting photos and tips on Facebook, too, so please share what has worked for you at www.facebook.com/NortheasternIndianaBeekeepersAssociation. 🌻

Image by Dean Gerber

President's Minute

The goldenrod has started blooming and it is time to harvest. I had a great harvest this year. I have to make a correction in the amount that I have harvested over the years. I wrote in the last newsletter that I would get .31 gallons of honey per frame. This calculation has been figured over multiple years. My volume was measured by Ball Jars. I fill quart and pint jars. I pulled 227 frames off all of my hives and calculated that I would get 71.5 gallons of honey. I harvested 72 gallons. I was pretty happy with myself that things worked out so well. Okay, I was really happy with myself. I was thinking that I really have this dialed in. I had just the right number of jars for all of my honey. I found a discrepancy, however, when I was checking the weight of my honey which averaged about 18% - 19% water. My volume calculation was way off as my honey was way too light compared to the 12 pounds per gallon.



Here was my mistake. When filling quart Ball Jars, we were filling them to the line on the neck of the jar. This turns out to be about 4oz short of a full quart. To get a full quart the jar needs to be filled absolutely to the top of the jar. So my actual harvest was 63 gallons or 750 pounds. Still my best amount since taking up beekeeping. So the calculation is really around .28 gallons per frame including the cappings. I am sorry if this created any confusion. I will still use my method of calculating volume as we will continue to use Ball Jars. This really helps us to plan how many flats of jars we will need for any given year. With my correction my honey weighs just over 12 pounds per gallon.

Ted Braun will no longer be handling the extractor and uncapping bucket. He is doing more traveling and will not be available. Thank you, Ted, for doing this for many years. Stephanie Fenstermaker (our librarian) has graciously offered to keep the club's equipment. Her contact information is litfroggy@yahoo.com and her cell is (260) 579-2565. Remember, if you borrow the equipment, please remember it must be returned in the the condition that it was received. Please make sure that it is cleaned and as much of the propolis and wax are removed as possible.

Our next meeting will be a question and answer session. We will have senior club members up front to provide all solutions to everyone's bee issues. Please send questions to my email address, clasalle@orthone.com. I think this will help us get the best answers and a chance to do some research if necessary. Debbie Seib of The Beekeepers of Indiana will be at the meeting to give us some insight into what the state club can do for us and how we can be more supportive of the state.

Thanks to the leadership team for all of their work. Thanks to John for the "bonus" newsletter. See you all soon.

— Chris

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Jeff Mains, Columbia City
 Elisabeth Mains, Columbia City
 Ed Schilling, Spencerville

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SURVIVING WINTER

BY DEAN GERBER

Successfully overwintering beehives in Indiana is the result of much trial and error. Over the years, I've experimented with many ideas. You keep doing what works and continually refine your beekeeping practices. Along the way, you try to keep good perspective. For example, most of the hives that I've put inside a barn for the winter have been single hives, nucs or weak hives, so the results have not always been good.

My winterization process starts soon after I take off honey. I evaluate each hive, test/treat for mites, feed the lightweight hives, and start making sugar blocks.

EXPERIMENT #1

Several times, I've put single story hives into my hog house with the pigs for the winter. It's kept at 65-72 degrees. The bees fly openly. Bees fly up against the Visqueen curtain, trying to get out and then many die along the curtain, much like they would in a greenhouse. Not good. The moisture is high in a hog house which is not good either. One year I fed sugar syrup, which overloaded them with too much moisture, and most hives died. A sugar block would have been much better. I normally have hogs in there for a maximum of 3 months, so when the building goes empty in January or February, I must move the hives out into the cold so the hog house can be power washed. Leaving the hives inside

during washing would be disaster. I do not do this anymore because of the high moisture and having to move hives out into the cold during midwinter.

EXPERIMENT #2

I've put hives into the inter part of my barn, several winters. I surround the hives with a tarp, keeping it dark & enclosed. One year, I put a heat lamp in there, but the bees fly out, buzz the heat bulb, and





die! Not good. Keeping it dark is better. More dormant. It's best to wait to put bees into a barn until it gets cold — below freezing. I had a sliding door near by, that I would open up (on nice sunny days) and pull the tarp back from around the bees, so they could take cleansing flights. There were several negatives to this approach. First, anytime we got some sunny or warmer days, it stayed cold in the shaded barn, so the bees wouldn't get as active as outside hives exposed to sunshine. Second, while barn temps were more even, it stayed colder longer. Hives kept in the barn were way behind those left outside. It was like they were still in dormancy when spring hit, with very little brood raised. If I use this method in the future, I will take them out of the dark barn in very early March, weather permitting, so the bees can get sunshine and start raising brood quicker.

EXPERIMENT #3

Single hives and nucs were put into my barn on wood shelves, just inside a south-facing door. Admittedly, some colonies were weak going into the winter. On warmer days (above 40 degrees), I would open the sliding door and allow the bees to fly freely. They got the full sun. I had a tarp enclosed in the back of the hives, so I could run a small heater inside there, when temps dropped

below 25 degrees. I put a sugar block on top of each hive, for food supply. In this experiment, about one-third of these hives survived. The biggest negative was the amount of daily management, for example, deciding every day whether to open the barn door or keep it closed. Sometime when the weather started out nice then turned cold, it was difficult to manage.

Some winters I've not done anything to the hives outside, while other years I've bungie strapped 1" Styrofoam around them for better insulation value. This helps, especially in severe cold winters.

THIS IS WHAT I DO NOW FOR WINTERIZATION

Sometime between November 15 and Thanksgiving, I put a Visqueen windbreak around the hives, to the south and west, if no natural protection is present. I get this plastic curtain from a grain elevator. It's five-foot tall, reinforced Visqueen used for hog buildings. Tough stuff. The windbreak is put up with fence posts, 2x4's and 2x2's screwed together. The barrier keeps the cold winter wind from penetrating. I re-use this windbreak year after year.

Next, I wrap the hives with black tar paper and staple it on. This helps on sunny winter days to absorb sunshine and warm the hive. Bees can move to stored honey quicker as hive warms. Helps to



Continued from Page 5

keep wind out. I re-use the tar-paper wraps year after year.

All my inner covers are extended (1.75" - 2" tall) and have a 1.5" wide notch cut out on bottom side, which is most important for winter ventilation. This is the best modification I've done to my hives. With this inner cover extension, I have room on the inside of inner cover to put dry sugar around the hole, a piece of shag carpet over that, a piece of 1" Styrofoam inside the inner cover, and finally the lid on top! The carpet absorbs excess moisture and the insulation board helps keep heat from escaping! This has worked well. I reuse the shag carpet and Styrofoam year after year.

In the fall, I put sugar syrup on all lightweight hives, as much as they will take, until the desired weight is attained. However, by November 1, I take all sugar syrup off so the hives can evaporate out excess water from the syrup before cold weather sets in. Too much moisture in hives proves fatal to the hives. If hives are still light on November 1, I add a two-inch sugar block.

Continued on Page 8





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Upcoming NEIBA Events

All meetings will be held at Classic Café

Thursday, September 19 - 7 p.m.

Panel Night - Question and Answer Session.
Refractometer available for checking moisture content of your honey.

Thursday, October 17 - 7 p.m.

Topic TBD, Dave Shenefield,
Largest Indiana Beekeeper

Thursday, November 21 - 6:30 p.m.

Harvest Banquet with guest speaker
Kent Willams, commercial beekeeper
Reservations required.

October 25-26, 2019

Beekeepers of Indiana Fall Conference

The 2019 state conference will be held October 25-26 at the historic French Lick Springs Hotel. Randy Oliver of ScientificBeekeeping.com will be the keynote speaker. In addition, the conference will feature hands-on workshops about making packages, catching swarms, creamed honey, bee anatomy, and beekeeping neighborliness. There will also be a honey show. Complete registration details, updated agenda, and directions to the hotel are available at indianabeekeeper.com. 🌻

Invite a New Beekeeper to join NEIBA. Share this newsletter and membership form with a friend and invite them to our next meeting!



Membership Form: Northeast Indiana Beekeeper's Association

If you are renewing your membership and your information has not changed, just fill in your name..

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Dean Gerber, Treasurer
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Continued from Page 5

All single hives and nucs get a sugar block regardless of weight.

I've made blocks to fit the full width of 10-frame hives, but they are too big and break easily. I now make all sugar blocks the size for nucs (5.75" wide x 17" long x 2" thick). This size creates a one-inch gap for air circulation around the block. I can use one block for nucs or put two sugar blocks on a full hive.

To winterize nucs, I put them together in groups of two or three. I put a piece of insulation into a garbage bag (to keep it dry) and place this between each nuc. I also put one-inch Styrofoam on the outside of nucs and then wrap the entire group of nucs with tar paper. Of course I put a sugar block on top, with carpet & 1" Styrofoam in the inner cover.

For winterizing single hives, I've tried stacking two singles over each other and also on top of a full two-story colony. I like over a two-story colony best, as the heat from the full sized colony helps the single to survive.

To set up for this, choose a strong two-story colony. Take off top lid and inner cover. Place a double screen on top of two-story hive. A double screen is a 3/4" board rim with screen on both sides. Heat can go through, but not the bees. (Never use a queen excluder in place of a double screen.) Above the double screen, place a 3/4" wood rim around three sides, leaving the front open as an entrance for the single hive. Place an entrance reducer on the entry, then stack the single hive on top. Finally, cap it all off with a sugar block, 2" wooden rim, inner cover, carpet, 1" Styrofoam, and top lid. Both hives are then wrapped in black tar paper.

Remember! A 1.5" notch cut out of bottom of the inner cover is a must for winter ventilation!



Easy No Cook Sugar Blocks

I have a wooden box mold (homemade), lined with wax paper, so they blocks come out easy. For two nuc sugar blocks, you will need 16 lbs. sugar (4 bags), 16oz. water, 1 strong Tbsp of white vinegar, 1 strong Tbsp HoneyB Healthy.

Mix, vinegar, water and HoneyB Healthy all together, then sprinkle into sugar (do not pour), while mixing well. Pack into mold. (I use a wood block to pack tight.) Let set 24 hrs, then turn upside down (quickly) and gently lift off mold. Remove wax paper. On day 2 or 3, mist with a little water. Let set for at least 2 weeks to harden (3 wks is better). Any unused sugar blocks can be saved for the next winter season. ☀