



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - September, 2026 issue #31

Our Mission: Supporting Napa's beekeeping community through educational outreach, treatment-free management, and pollinator habitat advocacy.

A few words from Martin



Greetings to you all! We are quickly coming to the close of Summer and will be celebrating the Autumnal Equinox on September 22nd. These celestial markers are important way-points in the annual growth cycle of a honeybee hive. As we discussed at our last meeting with guest speaker Christine Kurtz, the Summer Solstice

marks the beginning of the hive's population contraction with the equinox being the half way point until starting to expand again at the Winter Solstice.

With this shift in mind, we need to modify some of our focus and methods as beekeepers. The time for big hive manipulations has ended and our mindset should move to the defensive. We now need to think about reducing the hive entrance to help prevent robbing and be on the look out for yellowjackets hanging around and looking for an easy meal. Robbing can happen very quickly, so keep inspections short and minimize the amount of time the hive is open. Storing something near the hive that can be used to plug the entrance without delay is a good idea too. Once the colony is being robbed out, immediate action on the part of the beekeeper is required! Plug them up and call your bee buddy to relocate the hive to a different location.

As we proceed with our end of season inspections, ask yourself, does the hive have a good sized population and ample stores to overwinter, or is the hive already

showing signs of decline? What about an end of season mite check? A mite count can give you some very helpful information about what might be in the immediate future for a hive. Do they have a little extra honey available to harvest, or will they need everything they have and possibly require feeding? Use these next couple of months to take action and get your hive ready for winter, because the calendar and bees aren't going to wait. You can find a full list and more helpful tips for preparing hives for the winter in our new **Monthly To-Do List** section.

In last month's newsletter we sent out a survey asking for feedback about the club. Thanks very much to those who took a moment to give us your feedback. We are looking forward to using your input and suggestions to improve our club by delivering the information, skills and workshops that matter to you most!

- Martin Podell

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Save the Date - NCBA and Other Happenings

NCBA HIVE DIVE

When: Sunday, September 13, 10 - 11:30am
Where: Shawn's Apiary at Black Stallion Estate Winery, 4089 Silverado Trail Napa
Bring: your protective gear and curiosity
Open to NCBA members

SEPTEMBER NCBA CLUB MEETING

When: Monday, September 21
Come for one or all portions of the evening.
5 - 6pm: Club Hive Dive **6 - 6:30pm:** Q&A
6:30 - 7:30pm: General Club Meeting
Where: Napa Grange, [3275 Hagen Road, Napa](#)
What: pre-winter hive management; plus what's happening with *your* hives?

NOVEMBER NCBA GATHERING

In November, we'll free up your third Monday evening (no monthly meeting), but you won't want to miss our 2nd Annual NCBA Saturday potluck!
*Mark your calendars - our tentative autumn celebration date is **Saturday, November 14.***



UC MASTER GARDENER'S FALL FAIRE

When: Saturday, September 26, 1 - 4pm
Where: 1710 Soscol Ave., Napa
What: Sponsored by the UC Master Gardeners of Napa Valley, this annual event is loads of fun for adults and kids alike. Over 25 educational booths, demos, activities, free seeds/bulbs, and more.
Also: This is the **SECOND** year NCBA will have a booth at the event!
Please consider helping out at our table - contact Christine at christinewask.ncba@gmail.com.



OLD MILL DAYS AT BALE GRIST MILL HISTORIC STATE PARK

When: Saturday, October 10, 10am - 2pm
Where: 4 Bale Grist Mill State Historic Park
What: Step back in time at Old Mill Days - try your hand at traditional farm chores like corn husking, butter making, and apple pressing. Watch artisans at work at historic trades such as flour milling and lace making. Loads of hands-on activities for children. Admission is \$5 per person; children under 2 are free.
For more info, visit: [Old Mill Days — Napa Valley State Parks Association](#)



CNPS FALL PLANT SALE

When: Sat, Oct 17 (10am - 3pm) and Sun, Oct 18 (10am - 2pm)
(CNPS members' early access on Saturday from 9 - 10am)
Where: Skyline Wilderness Park, 2201 Imola Ave, Napa
(free admission to Skyline Park for sale customers)
What: Sponsored by Napa Valley Chapter of California Native Plant Society. Over 2000 native plants ready to plant and experts on hand to help you choose! Drop by the adjacent Martha Walker Garden as well - a great opportunity to see native plants in a landscape setting. See last page of newsletter for additional information.



September Hive To-Do List



- Inspect hives 1-2x per month, assessing colony health for:
 - Worker brood (winter bees coming soon)
 - Queen
 - Few if no drones and/or drone brood
- Stores (honey, nectar, pollen) being laid above in brood nest/cluster
- Ensure that follower boards are in each box.
- Be exceedingly careful with your torch or smoker, if using. Have water nearby.
- Be mindful of robbing.

Signs of potential robbing:

 - Bees (and yellowjackets) flying at back and sides of hive, hovering at 'cracks'
 - Side-to-side maneuvering of bees at entrance trying to get past guard bees

To minimize risk:

 - Decrease hive entrance to ~1 inch.
 - Consider installing robber screens.
 - Seal any upper ventilation holes or secondary entrances with painter's tape or screen mesh.
 - Keep inspections quick and efficient; don't open hives on breezy days.
 - Practice hygienic inspections - do not leave honey, comb or sticky equipment out.
- Be aware of yellowjackets. Set out traps nearby.
- Consolidate honey in honey supers (again, reduce the volume of the honey supers with follower boards).
- Cull out old frames (brood frames should be replaced after 3-5 years; honey frames may last longer).

- Assess honey stores, knowing that a typical colony will need at least 8 deep frames (or 12 medium frames) of capped honey for winter.
 - Begin feeding 2:1 syrup if needed (2 parts granulated sugar to 1 part water, plus pinch of salt).
 - Use internal feeders only.
- Small colonies that are not likely to make it through winter on their own can be combined with larger hives. *Only healthy hives should be combined - check for mite loads, curly wing virus, overall health before combining.*
- If there is surplus honey, harvest in moderation. Remember, any honey unused next spring when the nectar flow begins can be harvested then without compromising the colony.
 - Return wet frames and cappings to the bees for cleaning (place inside empty top feeders or on top of inner covers of hive from which honey was harvested).
- Begin reducing excessive, unused hive volume that is not being used to reduce space that bees need to thermoregulate and protect.
- Make sure there are water supplies nearby.
- Provide hives with shade from afternoon sun.
- Know each colony's varroa mite load:
 - Using sticky-board or alcohol wash
 - Record findings for future reference
 - Consider caging Queen for brood break (only a few weeks left for this maneuver)



Survey Results

Our club is meant to support *you*, and so we greatly appreciate all input received from last month's member and subscriber surveys. Here is a summary of the take-aways:

Newsletters:

- widely read and appreciated, both by (wann) beekeepers, as well as bee-lovers and pollinator gardeners
- monthly (as is) preferred, but acknowledgements that they take effort to put out, so less often would be OK
- one person felt they are too long; another is grateful that past issues can be found on the NCBA website
- while every regular section is read by some/most respondees, the *Beekeeper's Bites* and *WOW Facts!* may become just occasional offerings

- suggestions that we include a monthly hive management “to do list” as well as what’s coming up (see *newly added section this month, ‘September To-Do List’!*)
- plus a lovely comment... “*Your newsletter is a gem among grassroots non-profit organizations!*”

Meetings:

- vast majority prefer monthly meetings, although as with the newsletters, would understand if they had be to held less often
- suggestions to make meetings more interactive, with attendees sharing more, including the use of break-out groups to make sure everyone’s needs and experience levels are being met
- of great importance is hearing of others’ experiences and learning of season-specific hive dynamics/tasks
- guest speakers are highly valued
- another suggestion (we anticipated this one!) is to stick to our schedule and not run over 🙄

Other:

- potlucks are pretty darn popular - we heard ‘*keep them up*’ from 60% of you
- 87% of hive dive attendees find these events very helpful
- the NCBA website is visited largely for its Calendar and Resources sections
- one person would appreciate a “*more open attitude about mite control.*” We are grateful for this comment because the “to treat or not to treat” debate is a lively one in beekeeping communities. Without a doubt, our club has a unique perspective in which we see ourselves as part of a movement to help bees adapt to increasing environmental stressors - definitely the long-game approach. If a beekeeper wishes to explore treatment options, there are loads of resources out there, and if anyone ever feels unwelcome or shamed for exploring/using these options, please call us out on that! *Everyone* is welcome.
- a suggestion that the club have an online forum or What’s App group to make communicating with each other easier - if anyone would like to take this on, that would be great.

Again, thank you all for sounding in. We are *co-creating* this community, your voice and presence are key.

Beeco’s Bee Talk



In classic Beeco fashion, here I am, writing my piece at the 11th hour while Christine and Martin twiddle their thumbs waiting to put our 31st newsletter to bed. On my behalf, I’ve been writing away, ready to address how special our club is in our approach to the species. Yep, treatment-free, sustainable, bee-centric management is a long game. Like all styles of keeping bees, it’s challenging, not always as rewarding as they say in the books, and takes a real commitment to understand what it means by putting the bees first. There are very few clubs in the state, if any, that have committed wholeheartedly to this style of management. We stand proud to have our own little cluster where all styles of management are welcomed, but the primary focus is to educate our community on how to best support the bees without any inputs, utilizing minimal inspections, and being respectful of the bees’ biological flow. To do that it takes diving a little deeper into the study of the life of the species (*bios-logia*, meaning “life-study”).

So here’s the pivot, where we can take a closer look at the significance of this time of year for the colony and how incredibly important it is that your bees right now are all well fed and healthy. The bees you are currently seeing in and around your hives are the ones that will be rearing the next generation of their younger sisters. Those new young bees will be the ones that see your colony through winter - hence their name “winter bees.” There’s a huge shift that is about to happen in the hive that could otherwise go unnoticed. It’s not something you can see with the naked eye or really even quantify in any tangible way other than an increased or decreased population. Your

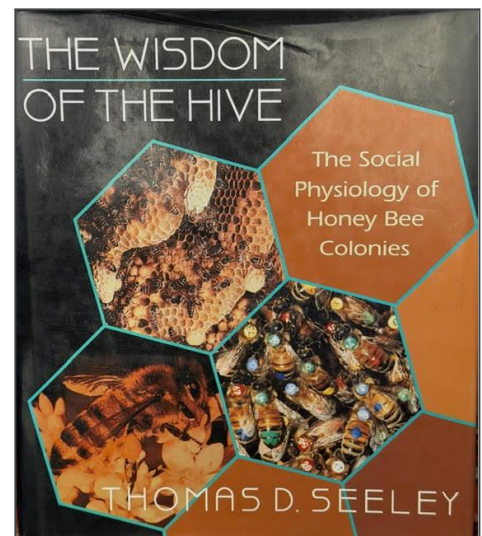
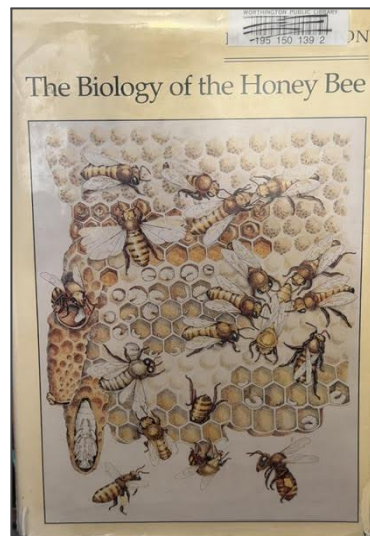
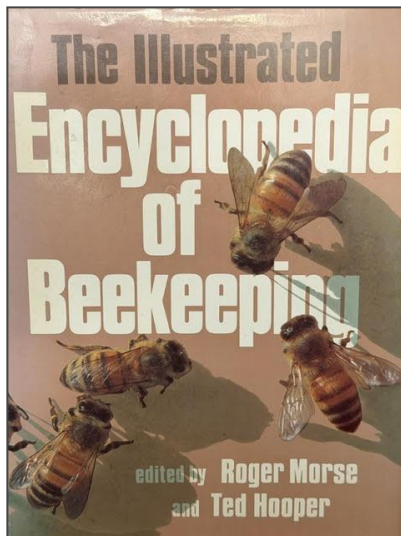
summer bees are passing the biological and physiological torch to the winter bees. Basically without going into cytoplasm, glycogen, pheromone 90DA, and protein compounds, all of which are way beyond my pay grade, it all comes down to the increase of those new young winter bees' fat bodies. Nutrition plays a critical role in the development of the fat body cells in this next generation of bees, so having the young developing larvae well fed on a varied floral diet is of paramount importance. Increased fat stores enable the winter bees to live longer and store the energy that helps to warm the hive through the depths of winter. Summer bees are absolutely selfless - they essentially fly themselves to death foraging to collect nectar, pollen, and propolis for the greater good of the hive. Of course, they will use some of that bounty to feed themselves, but the bulk of the rewards will be stored for future generations to use later in the year.

You can tell if your colonies are well fed by hefting the weight of the bee boxes: gently lift the back of the hive, if it's heavy you can assume the bees have ample stores. If not, your bee's reserves are probably low and you should write off a harvest for this year and feed them. During your final inspection, pay close attention to the frames with pollen stores; you should see a multicolored array of bright oranges, yellows, and red plugs neatly packed in and around the brood. Look deep down into the bottom of your open brood cells. Are those young larvae floating in a milky pool of royal jelly? Are your bees returning to the hive with big, full baskets of pollen attached to the corbicula on their hind legs? If these four things check out, *and* your mite levels are below threshold, *and* hive bodies are all sound and the hivestand is stable, chances are your bees will easily make it through winter and have a prosperous spring. If not, you should make it to all the upcoming meetings where we'll be covering how to rectify problems in the hive moving forward into winter. See you on the 21st!

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- Seeley, Tomas (1995). *The Wisdom of the Hive* (pg. 65-66, 215-218). Harvard University Press London, England

- Rob Keller



In the Pollinator Garden

California gardens can look like dry toast this time of year (*without* the jam) - a mix of blondes and browns that some might call drab, that time of year we put up with before rains once again turn our landscapes green and lush. How many of us have debated with east coast friends who boast about their annual spin around the sun having four distinct seasons, to California's... two? Dry and not so dry. But as Sherlock Holmes noted in *The Adventure of a Blanched Soldier*, "I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see." And Sherlock we must be, for the colors and textures of our gardens are *subtly gorgeous* this time of year! Bright blossoms have yielded to pale seed heads - perches for snacking songbirds. Foliage veers towards the dusky gray greens, welcome cover for the blue-bellies escaping the sun. Despite the heat, I do feel the shortening of the days, a shift of scents as I brush past the grasses. California's seasons are well suited for the patient observer.

I discovered a new book title recently, *Werner's Nomenclature of Colours*. It's kind of a 'wow' find for nature lovers. Way back in the early 1800s, German geologist Abraham Gottlob Werner created a reference guide for scientists to use when trying to describe the color of a moss, snail, rock, flower - anything in nature. Decades later, the Scottish botanical artist Patrick Syme expanded this guide into an even more comprehensive catalogue of shades and hues found throughout the natural world. This became immensely popular amongst scientists, artists and writers - even Charles Darwin called upon the *Nomenclature* when giving an account of his observations made during his voyage on the HMS Beagle.

Back to our late summer gardens... calling upon the poetic descriptions of Werner, my yard is awash with the muted shades of celadine green, wood brown, dutch orange, tile red, ochre yellow and more. These soft colors are easy on the eyes, almost nap inducing.

But then, just as one is tempted to doze off, a brilliant 'king's yellow' smacks you in the face. Adored by both honey and native bees (*and* butterflies, moths and beetles), California goldenrod nods its bright head, beckoning and promising pollinators a valuable, elusive late-season source of nectar. Its graceful appearance belies the fact that this plant is tough as nails. Without a doubt, I will be planting much more this fall as part of the golden, toasty palate that is California in late summer and as my gift to the pollinators.



California Goldenrod (*Solidago velutina* ssp. *californica*)

Evergreen, fast growing perennial to 2-5 ft tall

Spreads by runners/seeds

Tolerates many soil types; low water needs

Full sun to partial shade

Visited by ~140 bee and >120 butterflies/moths spp.

Calscape link: [California Goldenrod - Calscape](#)



Final note: mark your calendars for the annual **Fall plant sale** brought to you by the California Native Plant Society - Napa Valley Chapter (and yours truly). Held at Skyline Wilderness Park on Saturday-Sunday, October 17-18 (see last page of newsletter for more info). Come peruse over 2000 plants, pick up some goldenrod for your own garden and whatever else catches your fancy.

 Christine Waskowiak

Excerpts from the Varroa Chronicles

The beek and the Buddhist, walk into a bar

“What’ll it bee?” asked the Bark (that’s bar keeper, for the uninitiated).

“Water, no ice, with a dusting of powdered sugar on the side,” said the monk.

“Alcohol, straight up,” said the beek. “And please add ½ cup of bees to that, shaken, not stirred.”



And so began their deep conversation about, well, you know, how to count Varroa mites. Does the success of the colony outweigh the lost lives of the individual bees? Who will be sacrificed, and why? Only the nurse bees? To what end will they perish? And what will we do next? Does the end justify the means?

The beek got down to business with his cocktail, wishing he had some 91% ‘surface cleaning’ top-shelf alcohol, but the local distillate will have to do. Meanwhile, the monk’s face is sullen, her eyes watching the swirling jar of ‘medicated’ bees drown in the beek’s mix. “Let them bee,” she says quietly to herself.

The monk then sinks into a meditative state: “May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” But just what is the difference? The monk knows full well that the beek’s genocide jar will only prove the presence of the mites. It doesn’t provide the wisdom for a solution. The solution is another dilemma altogether, and who is to say if this *Apis mellifera* mortality is justified?

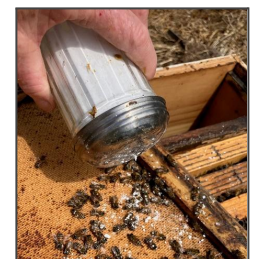
The beek admits, “Yes, many have perished for the good of the colony. Freedom from Varroa isn’t free! Now, let us count the fallen.” Meanwhile, the Buddhist has her powdered sugar jar doing the magic. Shake, shake, shake and shake some more! “Ouch, are you girls okay? Yes, this is painful for all of us.” The monk knows that her bees have suffered greatly, but they will live to fly another day. No one ever said that *The Path* is easy.

The respective mite test results are then counted. The beek determines that the percentage of the Varroa mite infection is less than 5%. No remedial action is necessary, and yet lives have been lost? The beek is pleased about the colony’s strength, while the monk mourns at the carnage.

The monk has a different test result, she thinks...maybe? There are a number of brown mite specs in the bottom of the white bucket. It does appear that the infection rate is greater than 10%, but did the shaking actually release all of the mites from the bees? Is this test accurate? After all, the only thing for certain is uncertainty itself. Should some action be taken, and if so, what? The monk only knows that there are *Many Ways*.

Testing for Varroa mite infection is further complicated by the options for a remedy that follow a positive test result. Solutions will depend on the time of year, the strength of the hive, the performance of the queen, and so forth. The temporary discomfort of caging the queen to break the brood cycle might be an option? Or maybe more powdered sugar should be applied during future hive inspections, twice a month? Perhaps the latter is a better path? The monk says, “Let them lick their wounds and preen. Bee strong and live long!”

Pure cane powdered sugar and an old fashioned diner sugar shaker team up for dusting the hive frames and between the frames. The sugar can be applied with a liberal application directly on the bees. Yes, they get excited about the sugar and are also stimulated into intense preening activity. What is the bottom line here? The beek believes that the cost-benefit ratio of the more accurate alcohol testing process is positive for the colony. The Buddhist monk is far less certain, knowing that all life is sacred. In a more contemporary cultural context, it was Thoreau that said, “*Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.*”



The beek interprets Thoreau's definition of "life" to mean the entire colony as one. Conversely, the monk values each individual bee, for without the bees, there is no colony. Maybe there is another alternative to alcohol death or the painful sugar shake? Did someone say "Norroa"? Mmmm, is this just 'big-pharma' trying to hook into a piece of our community? And besides, this product requires a State Operator's Identification Number to purchase the product, which most of us do not have. Should we even consider the latest idea, where the bees are gassed with CO₂ until they turn black and pass out? As Martin explained at the August meeting, the post-test that followed this experimental CO₂ test found that the mite release was incomplete with CO₂. The test bees also suffered side effects and looked a bit worse for wear.

Alternatively, one could just go with the flow, doing something by doing nothing, perhaps as an extension of Paul Honigmann's "low intervention" style. Does this answer your question? If so, bee free. If not, come to the next meeting at the Welcome Grange # 791. There is room for folk of all persuasions, and also for every bee, dead or alive.

And now, a postscript, from the botanical tradition:

As this story was coming together, the evening sun illuminated the dangling anthers of the perennial grasses which are loaded with yellow pollen. Yes, there was a time before the bees, when the wind did the work. In the largest worldview, there are many ways to procreate. But today, we are blessed with both flowers and bees, and beeks, too.

So please, do the right thing! That would bee, the right thing for *you*.



- Chris Cole, contributing NCBA member

Tales from the Club Hive

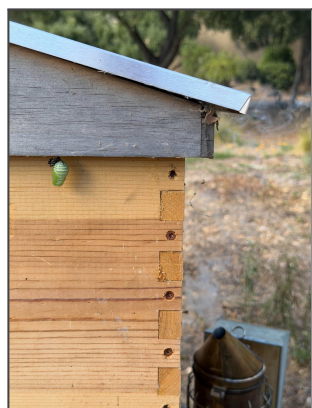
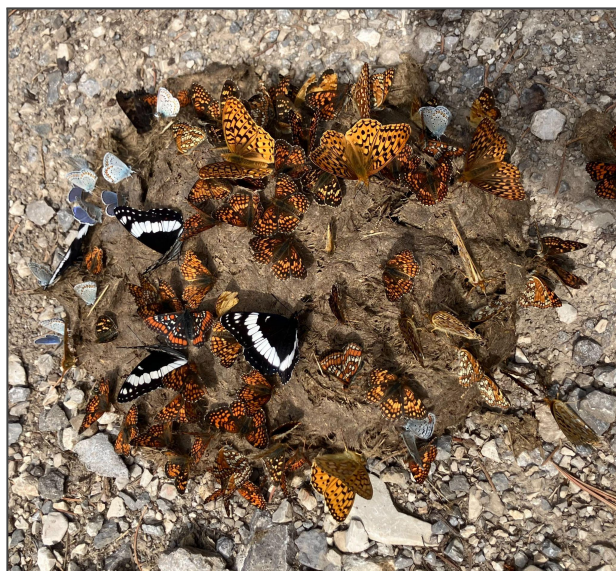
August 17: The hive has built out 2 full frames of comb that were added in late July. Large increase in capped honey which is now being stored around the brood nest and top of the hive. Queen continues to lay a solid pattern with recently emerged cells being backfilled with new eggs. 1:1 sugar water feeding has stopped. Multiple hive beetles were seen and dispatched, as well as wax moth larvae on the monitoring board.



Photo Gallery



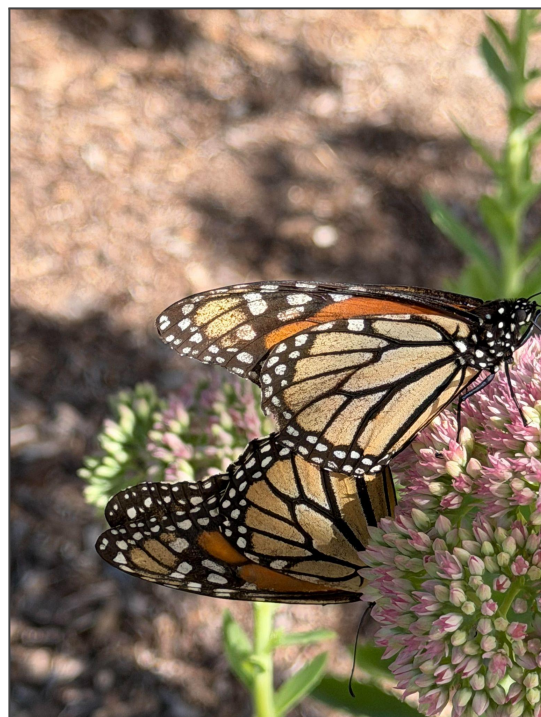
This time of year, all wildlife (including honey bees and we two-legged folk) need plentiful water. Below left are a couple of easy setups for adding a drinking station to your garden. Make sure there are rocks or other sipping perches. Below right is a pic from Chris Cole taken of grizzly bear scat on which several butterfly species are sipping grreat mineral-rich moisture... yum?! Bottom below, lovely pics from one of Rob's apiary sites.



Monarch chrysalis attached to underside of hive cover



close-up of chrysalis



one of dozens of Monarchs at a Napa Valley vineyard, recently Regenerative Organic Certified

NCBA T-Shirt Orders

Beautifully printed locally by Grapeleaf Graphics with our logo, 100% cotton, available in S/M/L/XL. Choose from short-sleeved (regular or ladies cut, \$25) or long-sleeved in grey (\$40). Shirts will shrink a bit, so order a size larger if you like a looser fit.

Purchase with cash or check (see t-shirt order form linked below).

Send completed  NCBA T-Shirt Order Form to Martin at martinp.ncba@gmail.com or pick up at an upcoming NCBA meeting.

A scanned image of a membership form titled "Napa County Beekeepers' Association - Membership Form". It contains fields for Name, Address, Phone, Email, and various checkboxes for membership options like "I am a new member", "I am a returning member", "I want to renew my membership", etc. There are also checkboxes for "I want to purchase a t-shirt" and "I want to purchase a sweatshirt".

NCBA Membership - we welcome you!

The Napa County Beekeepers' Association has an active membership program. We welcome beekeepers of any level, as well as folks that just enjoy learning about bees and the greater world of pollinators. Your membership dollars enable us to offer the benefits below, In addition to covering various administrative and website expenses:

- Guest speakers on a range of topics
- Hands-on educational events & workshops
- Various swag discounts & freebies
- Individualized mentoring/consultation
- Monthly meetings and seasonal gatherings
- Monthly newsletter

You may also submit a membership form online at our website: <https://www.beekeepersofnapavalley.org/form>

Note: a digital payment/donation option via Square is now in place on our website.



Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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NCBA Website: <https://www.beekeepersofnapavalley.org/>

Facebook: [Beekeepers of Napa Valley/Napa County Beekeepers Association | Facebook](#)



CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SALE

SATURDAY & SUNDAY

**OCTOBER
17 & 18**

SATURDAY: 10 AM TO 3 PM

(presale for members Sat. 9-10am)

SUNDAY: 10 AM TO 2 PM

SKYLINE WILDERNESS PARK

2201 IMOLA AVE., NAPA

FREE ADMISSION TO SKYLINE PARK DURING SALE



***MORE THAN 2000 NATIVE, DROUGHT-TOLERANT PLANTS FOR SALE
EXPERTS ON HAND TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS***

Presented By

**THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
NAPA VALLEY CHAPTER**

All proceeds benefit the Chapter's educational programs
and care of our community native gardens,
including the Martha Walker California Native Habitat Garden.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.NAPAVALLEYCNPS.ORG