



Napa County Beekeepers' Association Newsletter - December, 2025 issue #22

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! It's been quite a journey for the NCBA in 2025. Now that the year is drawing to a close and with the Winter Solstice right around the corner (December 21), it is time to wrap up this season's beekeeping tasks and begin to prepare for what lies ahead. But first... in November, we held our first annual club potluck and it was a smashing success! Thank you to Emmanuelle and Jean-Marc for hosting



us. The weather was perfect and fun was had by all. We even added a couple new bee words to our vocabularies as we played '*Pin the Endophallus on the Drone*' and learned that **hamuli** are the microscopic hooks that lock the hindwings and the forewings together during flight.

In other end-of-year news: we will not be holding a club meeting in December, but please join us on January 12th (one week early in honor of MLK Day) as we kick off 2026 and celebrate our **first** club meeting at our new 'hive' - the Napa Grange #791! Round Table Pizza has been a wonderful host to our club for many years and we are very grateful to them, but we've simply outgrown the space. The Napa Grange is but one of many granges in Napa County and across the U.S. The grange movement began in 1867 as an organization to promote and provide a "farm fraternity"

for farmers and their families, focusing on education, social enrichment, and the exchange of information. Sound familiar? This new location will give us a larger space for meetings and events, as well as supporting the network for local agriculture. Thanks to NCBA members Sharon Parham and Chip Bouril for helping us make this connection with Napa Grange!

We will also be holding **two** Club workshops early in the new year. Join us on January 24 as we build bait hives. These are easy to put together and a great way to get a little more life out of older (cleaned) gear, and a wonderful way to obtain a free, that's right, FREE local spring swarm of your own. Then we dive into our equipment cleaning and sanitization workshop on February 21, including how to clean gunky smokers.

It is a common theme this time of year to take stock of all that has transpired and spend a few moments looking back at things. In the bee world, some things worked out well, others not so much, and as a beekeeper, this is just how it goes sometimes. One of the biggest lessons for me this year was regarding the amount of time, attention, and planning it takes to

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manage a hive (or in my case, several), especially when the colonies are in different locations. Recently, two of the colonies I had collected last spring succumbed to Varroa mites. The first one to go was disappointing, but fully expected. It had been a weaker hive all summer and was showing all the telltale signs: high mite counts, spotty brood and Curly Wing virus. The second was a little different. This colony had been strong, building up in size quickly and putting away an impressive amount of stores right up to the end, but some things slipped past me. I didn't get to my end of summer inspections as early as I had intended, nor did I do a mite wash and count on this hive. I doubt there was much I could have done to turn the fate of this hive around by mid-fall, but perhaps if I had gotten to either or both of these tasks earlier, the loss of this colony would not have been so unexpected. So one of the many questions I'm going to ask myself over the next couple of months is, *"How much time do I really have for managing bees and what number of hives would that accommodate?"* I would encourage everyone to ask themselves that same question, too.



Lastly, I can now say I'm a better beekeeper than I was a year ago, but still have a very long way to go and a lot more to learn. But if you're interested, please join me along this journey, I could use the company.

We'll see you next year!

- Martin Podell

Save the Date - NCBA Happenings

DECEMBER: No NCBA meeting in December.

Bees are staying warm and tucked in at home, and so shall we.

JANUARY 2025 NCBA MEETING NEW LOCATION

When: Monday, January 12 from 6 - 7:30pm

Note this is January's 2nd Monday since Martin Luther King Jr. Day falls on the usual 3rd Monday.

Where: Napa Grange, [3275 Hagen Road, Napa](https://www.google.com/maps/place/3275+Hagen+Road,+Napa,+CA+94558/@38.21111,-122.30833,15z)

Focus: The unseen and dramatic activity of a January hive prepping for spring

JANUARY BAIT HIVE WORKSHOP

When: Saturday, January 24, 10am - 12noon

Where: [BOCA \(parking lot; see right\)](https://www.google.com/maps/place/3275+Hagen+Road,+Napa,+CA+94558/@38.21111,-122.30833,15z)

What: Learn how to build a bait hive (swarm trap) in time for swarming season (as early as February 😊).



CLEANING & SANITIZING WORKSHOP

When: Saturday, February 21, from 9am - 12noon

Where: [BOCA \(parking lot; see right\)](https://www.google.com/maps/place/3275+Hagen+Road,+Napa,+CA+94558/@38.21111,-122.30833,15z)

What: Learn how to clean, sanitize, and prepare your tools and hive woodenware, *plus* we'll give a demo on how to clean your crusty, creosote-caked smoker.

FEBRUARY NCBA MEETING

When: Monday, February 23 from 6 - 7:30pm

Note this is February's 4th Monday since President's Day falls on the usual 3rd Monday.

Where: Napa Grange, [3275 Hagen Road, Napa](https://www.google.com/maps/place/3275+Hagen+Road,+Napa,+CA+94558/@38.21111,-122.30833,15z)

Focus: Bait hives and swarm retrievals

Other Events of Interest

OLD MILL HOLIDAYS - BALE GRIST MILL STATE HISTORIC PARK

When: Saturday, December 6 from 10am - 2pm

Where: Bale Grist Mill State Historic Park

[3369 Saint Helena Highway, St. Helena CA](https://www.visitnapa.org/events/old-mill-holidays)

What: Old Mill Holidays is a beloved community tradition melding history and holiday cheer. Live folk music and warm apple cider set the scene for visitors who are invited to craft wreaths, decorate cookies, watch live milling demonstrations, and see artisans engaged in spinning, weaving and other traditional crafts.

Cost: \$5 per person (ages 2 and under free); purchase tickets at the door

For more info: [Old Mill Holidays — Napa Valley State Parks Association](https://www.visitnapa.org/events/old-mill-holidays)

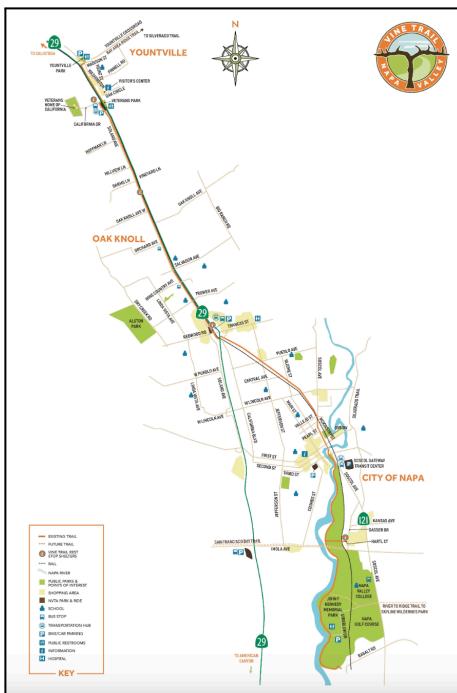


NAPA VALLEY VINE TRAIL

Consider this an invitation to create your own 'event' over the coming weeks. Several organizations, including NCBA, have helped the Napa Valley Vine Trail Coalition create a thriving pollinator garden along the 12-mile Napa to Yountville section. Looking at the map below (or go to [Napa to Yountville](https://www.visitnapa.org/vine-trail)), this garden is located between Darms Lane and Oak Knoll Avenue.

Martin and Christine met NCBA member Chip Bouril (also of Natural Resources Conservation District) and TC Hulsey (Vine Trail Coalition) a few weeks ago to dig in another couple dozen plants. The garden is solidly establishing itself and is a wonderful example of how a public space can be beautiful, functional, *and* support native wildlife.

So get out those walking shoes or bikes and explore the Vine Trail when you are hankering for a good dose of fresh air.

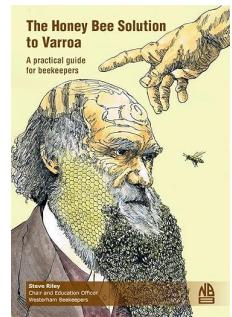


Beeco's Bee Talk



Happy Holidays, ya'll... not a lot going on in the way of hive management right now. Back in the day they would say this is the time of year for the beekeeper to rest, slow-down, read a book, fix their woodenware - I wish! I can get behind diving into a book this time of year, and here's what I am currently reading that is really good:

The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa, by Steve Riley. I'm not that deep into it, but from what little I've read, it's super informative. I believe the author won a silver medal for 'general interest beekeeping' book at Apomondia this year in Stockholm, so it's that kind of good! Props to our very own Mea McNeil who spoke to our club earlier this year for winning a gold medal in her division for her book *Bee Club*.



Generally speaking, it's probably best for us not to be going into our hives right now. Sure, it can be warm in the middle of the day, but at night it's getting pretty cold (as in low 40s tonight). Our colonies' populations are at their smallest right now and it requires an immense amount of energy in the form of calories (i.e., honey) for the bees to recapture the heat loss when you open them up. We should really just be pulling trays and popping lids (quickly separating the lid from the inner cover for a split second to look through the oval). I'd highly recommend not going in any deeper than that; that little oval lets out a lot less warm air than exposing the entire colony.



Your monitoring trays also give you a ton of information. There's all kinds of things you can learn about what's going on above by what has fallen through the screen. I personally can't imagine management without screened bottoms this time of year.



- A:** Tons of pollen and worker dust telling me the colony is raising babies and new bees are emerging.
- B:** This colony is moving their honey closer to the brood nest or they got locked in one rainy day and started to consume some of their stores
- C:** This colony is struggling with mites and water is getting onto the tray, moldy pollen.
- D:** These gals are taking a pounding from yellowjackets - see all the wings and legs from fighting at the entrance.
- E:** While the tray is out why not sneak a peek under the hive to see what it looks like underneath. You have to lay on your back under the hive and you'll get debris in your hair and on your back, but it's worth the view.

A



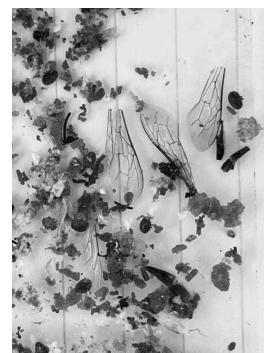
B



C



D



E

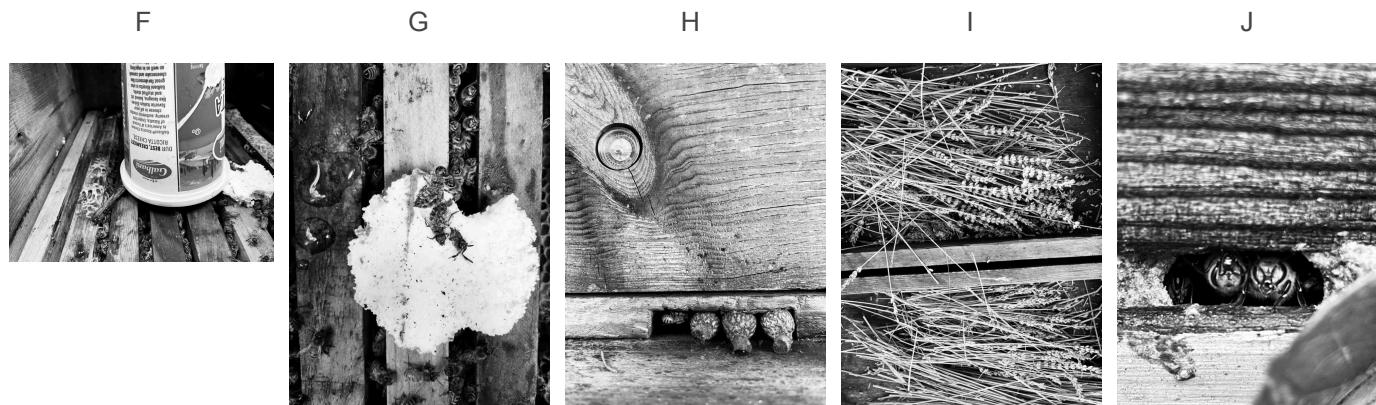


F & G: No shame in feeding if the colony is running short on stores. Give the hive a heft from the back, you'll know if they need a little bump. It is shameful to smash bees under the feeder. Move slower and with intention.

H: Reduce your entrances... they don't need a whole lot of space to come and go right now and it helps to keep the heat contained.

I: This is a good time of year to refill your lavender sprigs up in your top feeder. Thanks to Dana Gillespie, I got a ton of it a few meetings back.

J: Look at that propolis curtain!



Also, at our last meeting held at Stone Bridge School, we were talking with Julius Mueller from the Napa County Ag Commission about how we as a club might be able to better educate and help identify problems in the hives, specifically identifying the new, very invasive pest on the horizon, *Tropilaelaps*. A big challenge would be how to get Valley-wide samples of beekeepers' hives without everyone having to bring their monitoring trays to the meetings. Although that does sound like a fun night - everyone's monitoring trays set out in the Grange Hall, science fair style!

I have been experimenting with taking tray samples using clear packing tape. It's really easy - just rip a piece of the tape off, slightly smaller than the width of your record-keeping paper. Holding up the edge of the tape so as to not dirty it, you lay the tape sticky-side down over the heavy traffic areas of your monitoring board and lightly rub the surface. Then place the tape facedown on your piece of paper and you've got a beautiful snapshot of what's going on with your hive. I've also been noting on the paper the apiary name, hive, date, and results from any mite testing. It's been a great study on which colonies have been able to hold mite levels down and the ones that were struggling. Zoom in on some of these pictures - fascinating, totally fascinating!



Lastly, take a second to slow down and look around, there are other beautiful things in nature besides bees, lots and lots!

- Rob Keller

In the Pollinator Garden

Out into the garden we go - muck boots over thick socks, layered like a wooly sheep, a mug of hot tea in hand. Clambering under shrubs to pick up fallen fruit, pull weeds, trim back straggly growth. Stopping to gawk at an improbable orb web strung between dry sage stalks, lady spider delicately waiting. Pouring seed into the feeders - watchful birds perched nearby.



Clippers in hand, some judicious cutting yields a large basket of evergreens branches. Some will be twisted and tied into a wreath for the garden gate, others will be strewn on top of a cabinet with pinecones and other treasures pulled from boxes tucked away 11 months ago.

Whatever our spiritual bent, December and the turning of the calendar year is laden with symbolic gestures. Our gardens invite us into a wintry relationship. We may embrace ancient traditions, but how lovely it can also be to create our own. We are, however, part of a long lineage of human beings for whom winter generally presented severe challenges for survival, fears that the sun would not return, occasions for telling stories to make sense of it all. Whether *your* traditions are ancient or novel, perhaps they took root in some of these longheld thoughts that emerged from the forests and gardens of old.

Evergreen boughs have long been symbolic of resilience and immortality because they don't 'die' in the winter.



Holly welcomes nature sprites to bring good fortune. Conversely, because of its prickliness, holly was thought to capture or ward off evil spirits before they could enter a home and cause harm.

Circular **wreaths** symbolize the cyclical nature of the year and promise the sun's return.

Bells may be rung during the winter to drive away demons that emerge during the dark nights of the year.

Mistletoe represents fertility, healing, and the bridging between different worlds. Ancient Romans and Celts believed it represented peace; they would lay down their arms and call a truce when they met under it.

Wassail (from Old English words *waes hael* or "be hale") is a strong drink, usually a mixture of ale, *honey* and spices, or mulled apple cider. When pagans went into the forest to fell the great oak for the Yule log, they would anoint the tree with wassail. At home, the wassail would be poured into a large bowl during feast time and the host would lift a drink and wish guests "waes hael".



That enormous **Yule log** was brought indoors and burned for 12 days to honor and welcome the return of light.

May you and yours stay warm and safe as we close out this year and welcome the next. With gratitude for our community and shared humanity.

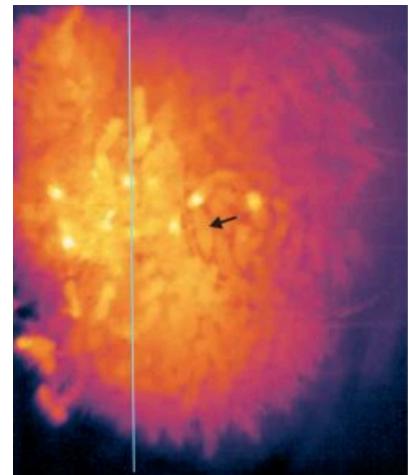
- Christine Waskowiak



Wow Facts about Solstice - Day One of the Bee's New Year

Winter Solstice, Sunday December 21 (officially 7:03am), is a notable day for bees and beekeepers alike. Daylight length (photoperiod) will begin getting ever so slightly greater each day. For honey bees, this is the signal to begin preparations for spring - such astute creatures. Some ponderings and a poem for you:

- ★ The honeybee colony's year can be divided into two halves:
 - From Winter to Summer Solstice: **expansion**
 - From Summer to Winter Solstice: **contraction**
- ★ During winter, the bees form a tight cluster with the Queen generally in the middle. Image at right is a thermograph ('temperature-picture') of an overwintering colony. Arrow points to the Queen in the cluster.
 - Worker bees vibrate their wing muscles to create heat.
 - The outer mantle is dense, with bees packed closely together, heads pointing inward, functioning as a heat insulating shield.
 - Towards the center, bees are more loosely packed and can freely move around.
 - The cluster expands or contracts depending on the outside temp.
 - Bees rotate positions so that everyone has a turn at staying warm.
 - For more nerding out: [Understanding Colony Buildup & Decline: The Physics of the Winter Cluster - Scientific Beekeeping](#)



- ★ When you see bees flying out on sunnier days in winter, they are certainly hoping to find some nectar, pollen and water, *but* these are also 'cleansing flights' for defecating - bees are very tidy and prefer not to poop in their hive.
- ★ A colony is at its smallest just prior to the Winter Solstice.
- ★ Within a few days of the Winter Solstice, worker bees slowly begin to raise the temperature of the brood nest region from a cool resting temperature of 70-75°F to brood rearing temperature of ~95°F.
- ★ This rise in temperature stimulates the Queen to begin laying eggs and form a small brood nest.
- ★ As those new bees emerge and the old winter bees die off, the population begins to expand rapidly - game on, beekeepers!
- ★ Poem "Winter Bees" by Joyce Sidman, illustration by Rick Allen



*We are an ancient tribe,
a hardy scrum.

Born with eyelash legs
and tinsel wings,
we are nothing on our own.

Together, we are One.

We scaled a million blooms
to reap the summer's glow.*

*Now, in the merciless cold
we share each morsel of heat,
each honeyed crumb.

We cram to a sizzling ball
to warm our Queen, our heart, our home.

Alone, we would falter and drop,
a dot on the canvas of snow.

Together, we boil, we teem, we hum.

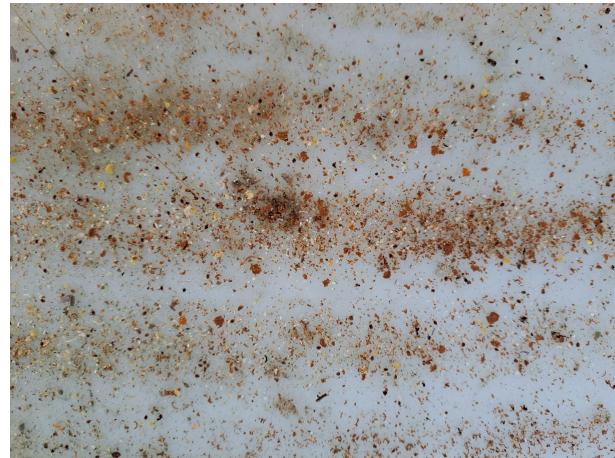
Deep in the winter hive,
we burn like a golden sun.*

Tales from the Club Hive

November 5th: End of season inspection. Added a feeder box filled with dried lavender to the top of the hive and a screened bottom box with monitoring board to the base. Very short visual inspection, good sized population with bees both in the top box and around the vent on the inner cover. Things are looking good!

November 29: Monitoring board check. Dropped pollen and wax debris show a good sized brood nest. No activity at the entrance, but that was expected due to the day's cold temperature and late afternoon inspection. Some mites on the monitoring board, but will check again in one week to get more timely and accurate information.

- Martin Podell



NCBA Membership - sign up now!

The Napa County Beekeepers' Association has an active membership program. In addition to covering various administrative and website expenses, membership dollars enable us to offer you:

- More guest speakers on a range of topics
- Hands-on educational events & workshops
- Priority access to available bees (via swarms, splits)
- Various swag discounts & freebies
- Individualized mentoring/consultation
- Continued monthly meetings & newsletter

A scanned image of the Napa County Beekeepers' Association Membership Form. The form includes fields for full name, mailing address, phone number, email, and zip code. It asks for the reason for joining and describes membership levels: Worker Bee (\$15/year), Honey Bee (\$20/year), Queen Bee (\$25/year), and Beekeeper (\$35/year). It also includes a section for dues, payment information, and a signature at the bottom.

Information on the different membership tiers and application form is available to download here:

[PDF NCBA Membership Levels & Form.pdf](#)

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

Beekeepers' Bites

Smoky Marinated Feta

recipe by Yotam Ottolenghi

<https://www.theguardian.com/food/2020/feb/22/yotam-ottolenghis-feta-recipes>

Prep 10 min

Cook 15 min

Marinate 2+ hours

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

10 garlic cloves, peeled

1-2 lemons – zest finely shaved into 8 strips, and juiced, to get 1½ tbsp

4 bay leaves

2½ tsp chipotle chilli flakes

1½ tsp paprika

250ml olive oil

1 tsp flaked sea salt

2 blocks Greek feta (360g), cut into 2cm cubes



Directions

Put a small saute pan on a medium-high heat. Once very hot, add the garlic and cook for about three to four minutes, turning halfway, until charred on the outside. Add the lemon and bay leaves, cook for 90 seconds more, then add the chipotle flakes and cook, stirring continuously, for about 30 seconds, until well toasted and fragrant. (You may want to have windows or doors open for this 'fragrantly spicy' step!) Off the heat, stir in the paprika, oil and salt, then leave to cool completely.

Once the mix is cold, stir through the feta, then transfer to a bowl or glass jar and leave to marinate, at room temperature if you plan to eat it within the next couple of hours, or refrigerated (and covered) if you're having it later. If you do refrigerate it, take the feta out of the fridge about an hour or so before you want to serve it, allowing the oil to come back up to room temperature. Just before serving, stir in the lemon juice.

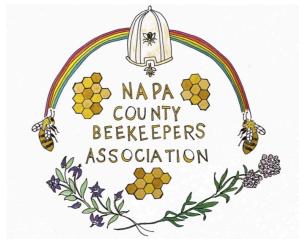
Note: Julie (aka Kirky) brought this marinated feta to November's NCBA potluck and it was a HIT!!

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 *newly available* long-sleeved in grey (\$30). Shirts will shrink a bit, so order a size larger if you like a looser fit. Purchase with cash, check or Venmo (see t-shirt order form linked below).

Send completed to Martin at martinp.ncba@gmail.com or order at an upcoming NCBA meeting.





Napa County Beekeepers' Association

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