



M A Y 2 0 2 6

Monthly Newsletter for the Austin Area Beekeeping Community

IN THIS ISSUE

Flora Guide | Events

Sexton: Swarming vs. Absconding | Lam: Board Update | May Recipe: Strawberry Spinach Salad | May

FEATURE ARTICLE

Honey Bee Swarming vs. Absconding: What's the Difference?

by *Elissa Sexton*

To many people, a cloud of honey bees leaving a hive looks the same no matter the cause. But in beekeeping, swarming and absconding are very different behaviors with different meanings for the colony.

Swarming: A Natural Form of Reproduction

Swarming is a normal and healthy part of a honey bee colony's life cycle. It is how a colony reproduces itself at the colony level.

In spring or early summer, when nectar is plentiful and the hive becomes crowded, the colony begins preparing to swarm. The workers raise several new queens while the old queen reduces her egg laying and slims down enough to fly.

At the right moment, about half the bees leave the hive with the old queen in search of a new home. Before moving to a permanent location, the swarm often clusters temporarily on a tree branch, fence, or other surface while scout bees search for a suitable nesting site.

Meanwhile, the original hive remains active with brood, honey stores, and developing queen cells. A new queen eventually emerges and continues the colony in the parent hive.

Key points about swarming: usually occurs during periods of abundance; part of normal colony reproduction; only part of the colony leaves; the original hive remains occupied; and it is often associated with overcrowding and strong colony growth.

Absconding: Abandoning the Hive

Absconding is very different. In an absconding event, the entire colony leaves the hive completely, abandoning brood, comb, and sometimes even food stores.

Rather than reproduction, absconding is usually a response to stress or unfavorable conditions. Common causes include persistent disturbance or predator attacks, excessive heat or poor ventilation, lack of food or water, heavy pest pressure such as wax moths or small hive beetles, disease or pesticide exposure, and poor hive conditions or repeated management disruptions.

Unlike a swarm, absconding colonies do not leave behind a functioning population to continue the hive. The hive may become entirely empty within hours or days.

Absconding is more common in tropical honey bee races and in harsh environmental conditions, but it can happen anywhere when bees determine the location is no longer survivable.

Key points about absconding: triggered by stress or poor conditions; the entire colony leaves; the hive is abandoned completely; usually considered a sign of colony problems; and it can happen at almost any time of year.

A Simple Way to Remember the Difference

Swarming = reproduction. Absconding = evacuation. A swarm is a thriving colony creating a new colony. An absconding colony is fleeing conditions it can no longer tolerate.

Understanding the distinction helps beekeepers respond appropriately — whether by managing overcrowding to reduce swarming or identifying environmental stressors that may cause absconding.

NEXT MEETING

Thursday, May 15, 2026

Lamar Senior Activity Center

2874 Shoal Crest Ave · Austin TX 78705

6:00 PM	Doors open — Meet, Greet & Eat
6:30 PM	Business Meeting
6:45 PM	SPEAKER: Nona — How and When to Make a Split
7:45 PM	Door Prizes
8:00 PM	Meeting Ends

BRING SNACKS TO SHARE!

FROM YOUR BOARD

Treasurer's Report for May: Checking opened at \$2,129.39 and closed at \$2,215.25 (\$85.86 in debits). Savings held steady at \$5,020.03. Square brought in \$171.02 in credits, ending at \$171.02. Grand total across all accounts: \$7,406.03. Thanks to everyone supporting AABA through dues, donations, and event purchases — Rachel Lam, Treasurer.

C A L E N D A R

Events for May & June

AABA Monthly Meeting May 15 · 6:00 PM | Lamar Senior Activity Center, Austin. Speaker TBA. Bring snacks to share!

Bastrop County Beekeepers Association — Monthly Meeting May 13 · Basic 101 class starts at 6 PM | Bastrop area. Beginner learning and local beekeeper networking.

Blanco County Beekeepers Association — Monthly Meeting May 21 | Blanco County. Hill Country beekeepers and hobbyists.

Williamson County Area Beekeepers — Monthly Meeting May 26 · 7–9 PM | Williamson County. For North Austin, Round Rock, and Georgetown beekeepers.

Herbs & Honey — Two Hives Honey May 30 | Two Hives Honey, Manor. Honey uses, herbs, and bee-centered education.

B E E S O U R C E S

Local Suppliers & Mentors

by AABA Members

Need queens, nucs, or equipment? Check the AABA member resource list on AustinBeekeepers.org, or ask in the monthly meeting — our members keep an updated network of trusted Central Texas suppliers and mentors.

S E A S O N A L N O T E S

May in the Apiary

by AABA Editors

May is the heart of swarm season in Central Texas. Inspect every seven to ten days and watch for queen cells on the bottom edges of frames — the classic sign that a colony is preparing to swarm. Keep populous colonies supered ahead of the nectar flow, and consider splits on any hive showing strong swarm indicators. With wildflowers peaking and warm days arriving, this is also a good month to refresh water sources near the apiary. If you catch a swarm or get a call, share it with the club — swarm reports help us track local genetics and timing year over year.

FROM THE KITCHEN

Strawberry & Spinach Salad with Honey Balsamic Vinaigrette

by AABA Kitchen

A bright, seasonal salad that lets May strawberries and your spring honey share the spotlight — perfect for a club potluck or a warm-weather lunch.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 bunch fresh spinach
- 1 cup sliced fresh strawberries
- ½ cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
- ½ cup raw pecans
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ cup olive oil
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine spinach, strawberries, Gorgonzola cheese, and pecans in a large bowl.
2. Stir together balsamic vinegar and honey in a medium bowl; slowly stream in olive oil while whisking continuously.
3. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Drizzle dressing over spinach mixture just before serving.

HONEY TIP

Use a mild spring honey — wildflower or clover — so it balances the balsamic without overpowering the strawberries. Whisk the dressing slowly to keep it emulsified.

WHAT'S BLOOMING

May Flora: Austin & Central TX

Here are common pollinator-friendly plants in bloom around the Austin area this month. Bloom timing varies with rainfall, temperature, and microclimate — keep an eye on what's actually opening near your apiary.

Pollen and Nectar Plants Blooming Now in Austin, Texas	
Common pollinator friendly plants in bloom around the Austin area, May 2026	
 Texas Lantana <i>Lantana urticoides</i> Bloom: Apr to Oct Pollinators: Bees, butterflies	 Mealy Blue Sage <i>Salvia farinacea</i> Bloom: Spring to summer Pollinators: Bees, butterflies, hummingbirds
 Indian Blanket <i>Gaillardia puchella</i> Bloom: May to Aug Pollinators: Bees, butterflies	 Winecup <i>Callirhoe involucrata</i> Bloom: Mar to Jun Pollinators: Native bees
 Purple Coneflower <i>Echinacea angustifolia</i> Bloom: May to Jul Pollinators: Bees, butterflies	 Texas Frogfruit <i>Phyla nodiflora</i> Bloom: May to Nov Pollinators: Bees, butterflies
 Blackfoot Daisy <i>Melampodium leucanthum</i> Bloom: Mar to Nov Pollinators: Bees, butterflies	 Lemon Beebalm <i>Monarda citriodora</i> Bloom: May to Jul Pollinators: Bees, butterflies
Bloom timing varies with rainfall, temperature, and microclimate.	

Watch for: Strong nectar flow is on — stay ahead of supers, monitor for swarm cells weekly, and keep an eye on water sources as temperatures climb.