



M A R C H 2 0 2 6

*Monthly Newsletter for the Austin Area Beekeeping Community*

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**VOL: 28**

**FEATURE ARTICLE**

## What to Do for the Bees During a Prolonged Drought

*by Elissa Sexton, President*

Central Texas is no stranger to drought, and our bees feel it just as much as we do. When nectar and pollen sources dry up, colonies can quickly become stressed. Here's how to help your hives through a dry spell.

**Water first.** Bees need water to cool the hive and dilute honey for feeding brood. Set up shallow water sources (corks or pebbles help prevent drowning), keep them close to the apiary, and refill daily during extreme heat.

**Feed when the flow stops.** A prolonged drought can shut down nectar flow entirely. Use 1:1 sugar syrup in spring and summer to support brood rearing, and 2:1 syrup later in the season to build stores. Feed internally — frame or top feeders — to reduce robbing pressure. Add pollen patties if natural pollen is scarce, but check them often for mold or beetle activity.

**Watch for robbing.** Scarcity makes hives vulnerable. Reduce entrance size, avoid spilling syrup, and combine any very weak colonies rather than trying to carry them through independently.

**Don't harvest.** If stores are low, leave them. Hives need 60–90 lbs of honey to stay strong, and drought is not the time to take what they've worked to save.

**Signs of trouble:** bees bearding excessively outside the hive, a very light hive, fighting at the entrance, or dead bees with heads stuck in cells are all warning signs to act quickly.

## FROM YOUR BOARD

Our newly elected Vice-President Kellie is working on a fresh look for the AABA website and needs your photos — comb, honey, brood patterns, your apiary, yourself! Email to [Kellie@knightling.com](mailto:Kellie@knightling.com) with a location note (South Austin, Round Rock, etc.). Anonymous contributions welcome.

## BEE SOURCES

### Where to Get Your Bees This Season

by Kellie Sherrill, Vice President

Whether you need a new mated queen, a nuc to start a fresh hive, or just a few supplies for an established apiary, these local and regional suppliers have you covered:

#### The Bee Supply — Round Rock

thebeesupply.com | (800) 356-4229 | 1205 Round Rock Ave #119 | Ask for Becky, our Past President!

#### Two Hives Honey — Manor

twohiveshoney.com | (737) 203-8598 | 7617 Nez Perce Trce, Manor, TX 78653

#### Bee Weaver — Navasota

beeweaver.com | (737) 230-3435 | 16481 CR 319, Navasota, TX 77868

#### Bird & Bee Farm — Rockdale

birdandbeefarm.com | (512) 760-0170 (Gene) or (512) 808-8533 (Cindy)

#### R Weaver — Navasota

rweaver.com | (936) 825-2333 | 16495 County Rd 319, Navasota, TX 77868

#### Pacha Mama Bees — Austin & Bastrop

pachamamabees.com | (512) 921-6606

#### Lockhart Honey Company — Lockhart

lockharthoneycompany.com | (512) 944-5270 | Kenny@lockharthoney.com

## PEST MANAGEMENT

### Varroa Mite Treatment: Your Options Explained

by Rachel Lam, Treasurer

Varroa destructor remains the single greatest threat to honey bee colonies in Central Texas. Our mild winters allow year-round brood production, which means mite populations can build fast — making regular monitoring non-negotiable.

Test, don't guess. The alcohol wash (or soap wash) is the most reliable field method: collect ~300 nurse bees from a brood frame, submerge in alcohol or soapy water, shake, and count the mites. A rate of 2–3% (roughly 6–9 mites per 300 bees) is the threshold for most Texas beekeepers. Powdered sugar rolls and sticky boards can supplement, but the alcohol wash gives you the clearest picture.

Treatment options: Conventional synthetic miticides are effective when rotated to prevent resistance — never apply during a honey flow. Organic options include oxalic acid (most effective during broodless periods) and thymol-based products like Apiguard (best in warm weather). Essential oil blends can help as part of a broader strategy but shouldn't be your only line of defense.

Cultural controls matter too. Queens with Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH) traits give colonies a natural edge. Drone brood removal interrupts mite reproduction. Splitting colonies or requeening creates brood breaks that can temporarily drop mite loads significantly.

Bottom line: test in early spring, late summer, and fall at minimum. Treat based on numbers, not the calendar. Strong, well-monitored colonies are your best tool against Varroa.

## CALENDAR

### Events for March & April

**Two Hives Honey — Beekeeping Apprenticeship** March 8 (1–5 PM) • March 28 (9 AM–1 PM) • April 11 (1–5 PM) | Austin | ~\$650–\$1,650. Hands-on hive work: inspections, swarm traps, honey extraction and more. Twohiveshoney.com

**The Bee Place — Basic Beekeeping Classes** March 28–29, April 4, 11, 18–19, 25, May 2 | Dripping Springs. Small-group classes with live hive inspections. You'll hold frames! Thebeeplace.com

**Sunshine Community Gardens Plant Sale** March 7 • 9 AM–2 PM | Austin. 20,000+ vegetable, herb, and pollinator plants. Great source for bee-friendly garden plants.

**Spring Garden Forum** March 7 • 9 AM–3:30 PM | Temple College, Temple, TX. Full-day event hosted by Texas Master Gardeners — water-wise landscaping, native plants, and sustainable gardening.

**Austin Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale** March 28–29 • 10 AM–5 PM | Zilker Botanical Garden. Rare plants, vendors, and expert advice. Admission included with garden entry.

FROM THE KITCHEN

## Honey–Lemon Spring Muffins

by Joy Mills, Secretary

March brings the first big nectar flow and fresh spring citrus. These bright, simple muffins highlight the flavor of local honey and are perfect for celebrating the season.

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup local honey
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup melted butter (or mild oil)
- 2 eggs
- ¾ cup milk or buttermilk
- Zest of 1 lemon + 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 2 tsp baking powder • ½ tsp baking soda • ½ tsp salt • 1 tsp vanilla
- Optional glaze: ¼ cup honey + 1 tbsp lemon juice + ½ cup powdered sugar

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C) and line a 12-cup muffin pan.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. In another bowl, mix honey, sugar, butter, eggs, milk, lemon zest, lemon juice, and vanilla.
4. Stir wet into dry just until combined — don't overmix.
5. Fill muffin cups about ¾ full. Bake 16–18 minutes until lightly golden.
6. Optional: whisk glaze and drizzle over warm muffins.

### BAKING WITH HONEY

Baking with honey? Substitute ¾ cup honey for every 1 cup of sugar, reduce liquid by ¼ cup, and lower your oven temp by 25°F to prevent over-browning.

WHAT'S BLOOMING

## March Flora: Austin & Central TX

### Texas Redbud (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis*)

*Blooms: Early–mid March*

One of the first major nectar and pollen sources of the year. Pink blossoms appear before leaves, giving bees easy access. Excellent for stimulating brood expansion.

### Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*)

*Blooms: Late February–March*

Fragrant purple flower clusters attract honey bees and bumble bees alike. Common in Austin landscapes — great urban forage source.

### Texas Bluebonnet (*Lupinus texensis*)

*Blooms: March–April*

Iconic state wildflower and an excellent pollen producer. Large roadside blooms create intense forage patches, even if briefly.

### Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*)

*Blooms: Winter–early spring*

Often called a weed, but one of the earliest nectar sources bees can find. Crucial during the late-winter forage gap.

Watch for: rapid brood expansion as pollen increases, light early nectar storage from trees and wildflowers, and — by late March — early signs of swarm preparation in strong colonies.

Each year we rely on the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA-NASS) honey report, but it does not fully capture the scope of honey production across Texas. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service publishes annual crop reports and is finishing the **2025 Texas Honey Report**, and we need your help. This report will be published statewide, and accurate numbers depend on beekeeper participation. Please take 2–3 minutes to complete this short (10-question), anonymous survey about your 2025 honey production

However, please complete the honey production section as accurately as you can — even estimates are helpful. [Survey Link](#)