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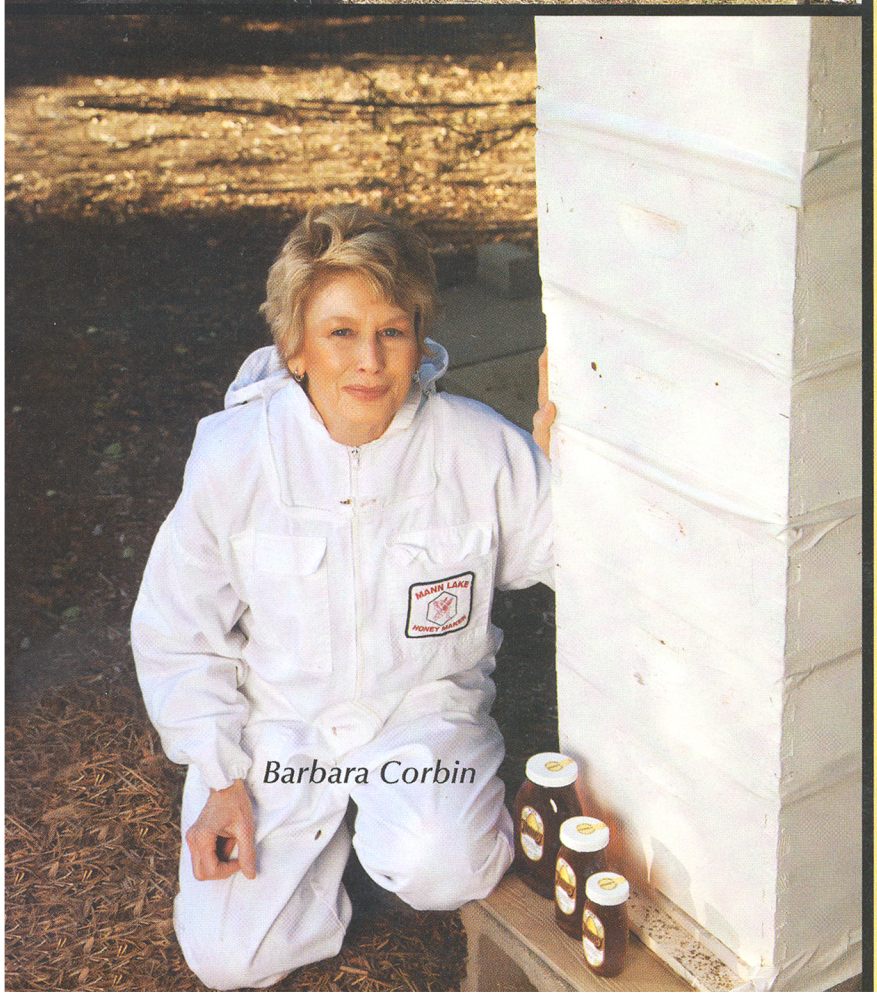


Barbara Corbin

# THE GROWING BUZZZZZ

*by Peggy Helmick-Richardson*

Approximately 8,000 years ago in a Spanish cave, a primitive artist painted a scene of a man extricating honey from a wild beehive. The yearning for honey as well as veneration of the honeybee continued over the years and by 3,000 BCE, beekeeping was an esteemed agricultural practice in Egypt. The desire for honey's tantalizing taste has yet to wane.

Among a long list of famed beekeepers you will find Aristotle, Martha Stewart, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Brigham Young, Henry Fonda, Maria Von Trapp, Leo Tolstoy, Lord Baden Powell, Sir Edmund Hillary and Scarlett Johansson.

Whether it be due to a fascination with the insect Apis melifera or a love of honey, a longing for a healthier lifestyle or greater agricultural independence, a desire for an interesting hobby or a full-time career, raising honeybees can be a sweet deal all around.

Barbara Corbin of Lucas credits her beekeeping maternal family for her heeding the siren buzz of the bee.

"My grandfather's parents were East Texas beekeepers," she notes. "When I was seven years old, we moved to a farm next to my mother's family. I was fascinated by those beehives and always wanted bees, but I thought when you lived in town you couldn't have bees."

After graduating from Arlington State College (University of Texas at Arlington today) with a degree in biology and a minor in chemistry and math, Barbara got a job as a research technician in a neurophysiology lab at Southwestern Medical School.

When the research project moved to Galveston, Barbara stayed behind. Her husband "Mac" had just graduated with his degree in electrical engineering with assistance from Texas Instruments and he was committed to staying in North Texas to work for the company. Barbara returned to school to earn her education certification and took a position with Nichols Junior High School in Arlington. After she taught life, earth and physical science classes for several years, the Corbins moved to Plano and started their family.

When Barbara, Mac and their son and daughter moved to their Lucas home in 1977, she also began long-term substitute teaching for the Allen and Lovejoy school districts. After working with the U.S. Census Bureau for the 2000 census, Barbara took a part-time job at the Spring Creek Campus Collin College library. Less than a year later, she was offered and accepted the full-time position of head of circulation for the school's Preston Ridge campus library in Frisco and she has held the position for over 10 years.

Barbara then began to explore the dream of trying her hand at beekeeping. To help get her started, a neighbor introduced her to Allen beekeeper Wyvonne Robertson Brecheen.

"She had bees and offered to be my beekeeping mentor," Barbara emphasizes. "It helps to have somebody help you get started." Barbara also joined the Collin County Hobby Beekeepers Association to further her apian education. Appreciative of Wyvonne's support, Barbara later took new beekeepers under her wing and devoted hours of time to young women competing in the annual local, state and national Honey Queen contest.

Barbara acquired her first honeybee hive when Wyvonne alerted her to an unwanted swarm at a nearby residence. It soon found a new home in Barbara's yard. "The first time I met Barbara, I liked her and thought she was brilliant," Wyvonne recalls. "We used to go out and catch swarms and have the best time!"

Although Wyvonne is not as involved in beekeeping as in the past, the two friends still get together to extract honey.

Learning that beekeepers are advised to maintain at least two beehives "so if you get in trouble with one, you can move brood, bees and honey around," Barbara soon added a second hive. The Lucas beekeeper eventually accrued 14 beehives.

Emphasizing that she has never had an interest in earning income from selling honey or bee products, today Barbara has three hives at the back of her Lucas property. Another hive was recently set up in her front yard after a pest control operator brought her a swarm he had collected from a customer's home, explaining that he didn't have the heart to destroy them. Barbara points out that her three principal hives are now kept behind a wooden fence because her husband never got comfortable being around the bees.

"2011 was the worst year for me as far as honey collection because I only produced 120 pounds," she points out. "This year I pulled 200 pounds of honey so my hives did better." While her recent annual yields needed only one extraction, Barbara's hives once produced so much honey that additional extractions were often required over the late spring and early summer period for honey collection in Texas. So that her bees have sufficient wildflowers to draw from, she maintains a patch of the native wildflower, Gaillardia, on a portion of their property.

Barbara has also seen honeybees in this area impacted by a number of other modern problems.

Ten years ago, the headlines in Texas trumpeted warnings of the arrival of the Africanized bees. These hyper-aggressive bees had

## Vegetarian Lentil Casserole

1 lb lentils, cooked
2 tsp. dry mustard
1/2 c. chopped onion
3 Tbs. vegetable oil
3/4 c. honey
1 tsp.pepper
1/2 c. sliced carrots
8 c. cooked white rice
1/2 c. soy sauce
1/2 tsp. ground ginger
1/2 c. sliced celery

Place lentils in 2-1/2-quart casserole. Combine honey, soy sauce, mustard, pepper and ginger in a small bowl. Gently stir into lentils. Cook and stir onion, carrots and celery in oil in small skillet over medium-high heat until onion is translucent. Add to lentils. Cover and bake at 350° for 45 minutes. Uncover and bake 15 minutes more. Serve over rice.

## Honey Chocolate Cake

2/3 c. shortening
2 c. sifted flour
1/2 tsp. soda
1 tsp. vanilla
1 c. honey
1/2 c. cocoa
2 tsp. baking powder
2 eggs
1 tsp. salt
3/4 c. buttermilk

Cream shortening, then continue beating while slowly adding honey. Beat in eggs, one at a time, beating well after every addition. Sift flour, cocoa, salt, soda and baking powder together 3 times. Add dry ingredients alternately with the buttermilk and vanilla to creamed mixture. Pour batter inot greased and floured 9 x 13-inch pan. Bake at 350° for 20 to 25 minutes or until cake tests done. Frost with favorite icing.

*Barbara Corbin and Martin Hicks*

been imported to Brazil for experiments in increased honey production and were reportedly accidentally released in the 1950s. Today they have been spotted across most of the southern United States.

Barbara explains the Africanized bee threatens the gentle-natured local honeybee hives because queens with Africanized genes have a greater chance at survival. "It used to be thought that the queen only mated with a few of the male bees, but they know now that they mate with a lot more," she notes. "And the Africanized male is much more aggressive than the European male." This leads to the potential of a greater number of Africanized queens being produced, and they mature faster, emerging from their cells one day earlier than their European counterparts. "The first one out stings the other still-developing queens," she continues, "and because queens don't have barbs on their stingers, they can sting repeatedly."

To simplify her monitoring for possible encroachment of Africanized bees, like many other beekeepers, Barbara marks her queens. Her vigilance has paid off and she proudly announces that she has not had to destroy a hive because of overly aggressive bees in a number of years.

Although Barbara shrugs off concerns about getting stung, she warns, "If you want to be a beekeeper but mind getting stung, find something else to do because it's going to happen." She recalls that one of her worst stinging incidents occurred when she failed to notice the broken elastic on one of her gloves and five bees got inside and stung her hand when they couldn't get out.

"A lot of a bee's world is dominated by smell and when a bee stings it leaves a scent that excites the other bees and tells them to come and defend," Barbara points out. "That's one of the problems with the Africanized bees. They are so keen on scent that once you get stung, every bee in that hive will be ready to get you. And they have not been able to breed that out of them."

Other growing problems Barbara has observed with local bees are tracheal mites, Varroa mites, hive beetles, the bacterial foulbrood and the fungal chalkbrood, along with the notably serious colony collapse disorder. With the latter, entire hives of worker bees have unexplainably disappeared, leading to an estimated 25% reduction in domesticated bees in the United States.

Shaking her head, Barbara sighs, "We are moving further and further up the toxic chain because some beekeepers are putting organophosphates in the hives to take care of the problems, but I decided I wasn't going to do that. It is very important for me that it is natural and not contaminated with anything. I'm organic here, even the grass."

Barbara points out that although re-queening hives yearly is a common practice among beekeepers, because of the multiple problems she sees area bees battling today, she has opted not to replace her queens every year.

"I was more interested in getting a race of hygienic bees," Barbara explains as to her preference for the darker Russian bees she has maintained for a number of years. "Different races have different characteristics of what they are more susceptible to, as far as disease. And I like the gene pool that I have."

Barbara's beekeeping skills and her love of bees have also provided her several opportunities to travel abroad. In 1998, Barbara attended the London Honey Show with Sarah Paulson, the 1997/98 Texas Honey Queen and 1998 American Honey Princess. The trip was provided by a donor in appreciation for Sarah's accomplishments and Barbara's support and training needed for the young woman to compete in these two prestigious events.

Barbara has also taken four bee-related trips to Panama after meeting Pennsylvania master beekeeper Tom McCormack. He has assisted the people of westernmost Panama with both beekeeping and humanitarian issues, such as providing clothing and medical supplies for 19 years.

The love for honeybees also continues inside her home. Bookshelves bulge with apical literature, framed pictures and cross-stitched pillows show bees, beehives or cute bee-related quotes and curio cabinets overflow with honey pots. On the tables and shelves are handmade candles formed from the wax of her hives.

Barbara has also collected an impressive bee and honey related stamp, cover and postmark collection, which she points out has the advantage of not taking up so much space. "I spend a lot of time at stamp shows and right now I have about 80 percent of

*Brenda Newell and John Moog*

the older stamps that are related to beekeeping," she notes. "For me, it's the beauty of them."

Barbara advises anyone interested in trying their hand at beekeeping to first take a class under a skilled instructor and recommends those offered by the Collin County Hobby Beekeepers Association (CCHBA).

A CCHBA seminar instructor for almost 15 years, John Talbert has been a beekeeper since the mid-1980s and owns the 500-hive Sabine Creek Honey Farm in Josephine. He serves on the board of CCHBA, is on the executive board of the American Beekeeping Federation and is an executive secretary for the Texas Beekeepers Association.

A growing interest in beekeeping has led to a recent rise in the number of CCHBA beekeeping students. John states, "Last year we had about 80 people. Our limit for each group of students is 25, so we had four groups of classes. Ours is 20 hours and we spread them over five Saturdays, starting in January.

"We recommend in the first year that you are in your colonies at least every two weeks so you can learn about your bees," he shares. "After that first year, you probably won't get into them quite that often. You don't spend more than 30 minutes in a colony because the more you disturb them, the less productive they are."

In addition to honey production and sales, John also transports his bees to farms at various agricultural locales in the United States, including California almond crops and North Dakota canola farms, for pollination services.

Some for-profit beekeepers have no interest in commercial honey production, raising bees strictly for pollination. This service is not one to be taken lightly. The famed entomologist and environmentalist E.O. Wilson explained it succinctly when he said, "Every third bite of food you take, thank a bee or other pollinator."

Brenda Newell and John Moog (known to their friends as "Bunny" and "Rooster") earn income from their 200 beehives solely by transporting to various agricultural areas around the United States for pollination of the fields. For them, a forklift is a vital piece of equipment for their beekeeping endeavor.

"We move the hives first to California for the almonds, then to the blueberries in Maine and then the cranberries in Wisconsin," John

explains. "There is a trucking company that we use. We load them on the truck, put the net over them and strap them down." The hives are then delivered to brokers in these agricultural areas. They disperse the hives to the different farms and once pollination is complete, the hives are loaded back on the trucks and returned to East Texas.

Although importing bees from significant distances may seem unusual, it is a common and vital agricultural practice. During the pollination period, the California almond farmers import almost one-half of all domesticated honeybees in the United States.

John Moog credits his neighbor and long-time beekeeper, Randy Klein, for their foray into beekeeping and pollination service. When not in "use" their bees and hives are kept in rural East Texas.

"We went out and worked with Randy for a little bit and decided it was a venture we would like to try," John states. "There are six of us out there and the famers let us keep our bees on their property."

"We do a little honey, but only for our personal consumption and to give to friends and family," he avers. "We probably do five hives and it is the East Texas clover honey. We have a three-frame extractor and probably get 100 gallons a year, which isn't much. The rest of our honey we leave in the hives and let the bees eat it."

Loaded with antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, and demonstrating antibacterial and antiseptic properties, honey has long been touted for its many health benefits. Since antiquity, it has also been used as a treatment for allergies and wound care.

Three years ago, Barbara learned first-hand the healing benefits of honey and gave her bees the opportunity to return the loving care she has given them for so many years.

Diagnosed with HER2 cancer, Barbara, who notes that she is allergic to every known antibiotic, developed a wound that would not heal as a result of her radiation treatment following her surgery. When it appeared that the only treatment left to her was more surgery, her doctor suggested putting honey on it.

"I came home and put honey on it and it was the first relief that I had from the pain," she recalls. Barbara credits her bees' honey for eventually healing her seriously damaged tissue. "I carried a bottle of honey with me everywhere I went," this bee devotee declares.

Whether you want to raise them or simply appreciate the multiple benefits that these tiny creatures offer us, honeybees deserve our thanks and protection.

To learn more about bees and beekeeping, check these sites: Collin County Hobby Beekeepers Association www.cchba.org; Texas Beekeepers Association www.texasbeekeepers.org; American Beekeeping Federation www.abfnet.org; and National Honey Board www.honey.com. ❖

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