



## Things to Do and See

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As predicted winter did arrive in November with a vengeance, but a mild, relatively dry first half of the month combined with a late flowering of the ivy meant that lots of pollen was brought into most hives and a large amount of late brood has been produced.

Most queens have continued to lay late so a brood free period probably will not occur until after mid month in December. This in turn means that oxalic acid treatments are best applied between 15<sup>th</sup> December and the New Year. The temperature at the time of treatment needs to be +3°C or above. I've found that the 'trickle 2' oxalic acid syrup solution to be very convenient, effective and cheap. 'Miteaway II' formic acid fume pads can still be applied but is less efficient when the day time temperatures are not above 5°C.

Cold doesn't kill bees, damp does. So long as you have ensured there is enough food/stores in the hive, i.e. 40lb or 6-8 British standard deep brood frames fully capped with stores at the end of October, then there shouldn't be a problem. Any light hives should have fondant or bee candy put directly on the top bars under the crown board. An eke can be used to give you and the block of food more room.

Cold weather does increase the likelihood of woodpecker damage to the hives as food becomes more difficult to find when the ground is frozen. If you experienced problems last year then it will probably reoccur, so get wire mesh wrapped around the sides of the hive to keep woodpeckers away from the woodwork of the hive.

Rats can also have a go at the entrance and gnaw through the wood to get access to the comb inside. This is quite rare and i have only witnessed this type of damage once in the last 19 winters. If you know you have rats then it is probably a good idea to call in the pest control anyway, or put some rat poison in cut up drain pipes around in the apiary.

The cold weather is good news for stored drawn comb if stacked on a mesh floor (entrance closed) or travel screen outside in the shade. The freezing action and cold air flow will kill wax moth larva and eggs.

Propolis becomes brittle with cold and so is easier to remove from boxes with a hive tool at this time of year.

Honey and beeswax candles make good Xmas presents to neighbours, who may put up with soiling of their washing and cars from our bees. So do be generous to these important people who allow us to continue to do our hobby.



## Things to Do

- Check your hives average daily varroa mite drop and if above about 1 per day, treat with Oxalic acid when the temperature is +3°C or above.
- Keep an eye out for Woodpecker damage. If it starts its not going to stop in a hurry, so get wire mesh put on and repair or swap damaged boxes as soon as possible.
- Make some candles (use the 'Andy method' to purify the wax first)
- Have a go at honey fudge as an Xmas present (see recipe at end) it makes your honey go a bit further as you only need 4oz



- Beeswax can be moulded into Xmas tree decorations and again can be used to make a nice present and does not use much wax.

- Scrape Propolis off the inside of boxes and scorch with a blow torch (this can be done anytime during the winter)

- Purchase oxalic acid (if not already done) the 'Trickle 2' comes with an applicator/measuring nozzle. 5ml of oxalic acid sugar solution is applied per seam of bees in the winter cluster.

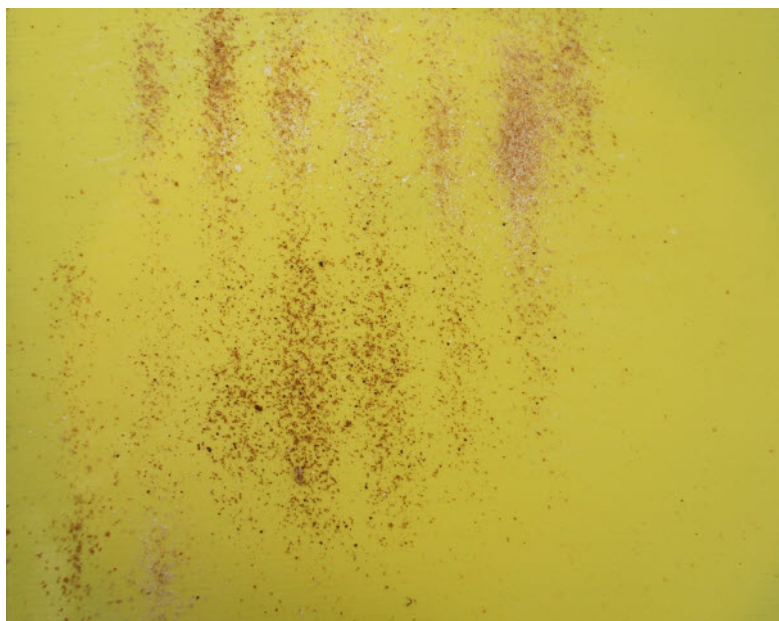
- Apply the oxalic acid with the applicator or a syringe to the seams of bees only. Try not to get onto the woodwork. (Store the made up solutions in the fridge). Unused solutions must be disposed of and

not saved for use next year.

- Check through your hive records and make plans for next year. Learn by your mistakes – we all make them.
- The Thornes on-line sale started on 29<sup>th</sup> November. Beat the VAT increase or suggest items for Santa to give you.

## Things to See

- Fine sawdust like particles of wax in seams/lines on the varroa monitoring tray. This is quite normal as the bees uncup their stores and eat to keep warm.
- Snow or frost melting first in the centre of the roof caused by the warmth of the bees underneath in the hive – this is a good sign.
- Pieces of wax looking like fingernail clippings in front of the hive or on the catch tray under the hive, this usually means a mouse has gained entry to the hive. Evict as soon as possible and remember to replace all the comb in the spring.





- Hazel trees have a good number of immature catkins on them again this year. The first normally open in our area around the end of the month [PHOTO]
- Bees flying on days when the temperature is above +6°C. This is quite normal, *bees do not hibernate*
- Pollen coming in on mild days – brood is still present or the queen has resumed laying.

## Plants in flower

Plant	Pollen Colour	Pollen	Nectar	Comments
Cherry - Autumn/Winter (Prunus x subhirtella)		V	V	Ornamental garden tree
Christmas Box		v	v	Starts to flower at the end of December.
Fatsia Japonica		v	v	Not fully hardy, can be damaged in severe frost. Ivy relative
Gorse	Rich golden yellow	v	v	Not much nectar but useful pollen all winter
Hazel (Early)	Pale yellow/green	v		Starts to flower at the end of December, no nectar as wind pollinated, small pollen loads.
Heather - Tree (Erica Lusitanica)		v	v	Honey scented European tree heather, much loved by bees
Heather - Winter/Spring (Erica carnea)		v	vv	Many coloured forms
Heliotrope (winter)	White	vv	v	Garden escape relative of our native coltsfoot - highly scented
Hellebores	Cream	v	v	Christmas Rose
Honeysuckle - Winter flowering shrubby		vv	v	Best plant to have in the garden
Mahonia - species & hybrids		v	v	Flowering well this year
Snowdrops	Jaffa Orange	v	v	Start to Flower at the end of December
Viburnum Tinus		vv	v	Flowering well this year

If you want to walk off the excesses during the Christmas period, then visit the winter garden at Sir Harold Hillier Gardens at Ampfield near Romsey. It has recently been extending its plantings in the Winter Garden, and as bees are kept nearby the keen eyed visitor can easily spot the plants the bees prefer on a mild day.

Happy Christmas to all my readers and best wishes for the coming year.

# Honey Fudge

## Ingredients

- 900g Granulated Sugar
- 280ml Milk
- 110g butter
- 110g honey
- 1/2 tsp salt

## Method

1. Soak the sugar in the milk for about an hour stirring occasionally
2. In a medium to large saucepan, slightly melt the butter to grease the bottom of the pan.
3. Add all the ingredients and bring to the boil. Boil rapidly for 5 minutes during which time the mixture must reach 115C/240F stirring all the time.
4. Take off the heat and allow to cool slightly, then beat until creamy.
5. Turn into a lightly greased 11" x 7" tin.
6. Mark when nearly set and cut into squares when well set.