



It's time to order your bees

Beekeepers begin season preparations

BY JULIA BAYLY
BDN STAFF

For Maine beekeepers in need of fresh colonies, it's time to start placing those orders.

"January and February are the perfect time to order bees," Richard McLaughlin, president of the Maine State Beekeepers Association, said. "But don't wait, as they start to get sold out quickly."

He encourages Maine beekeepers to buy local instead of ordering through companies in southern states, since there are plenty of suppliers of live bees in the state.

Locally raised bees, he said, can be picked up directly from the beekeeper rather than shipped over several days from points south, something that can overly stress the insects.

"The nice thing about a local supplier is you can call them and talk with them," he said. "They know what works and what does not work in Maine when it comes to their bees."

Finding out what does and does not work is key when it comes to bees, McLaughlin said.

"I really encourage those wanting to be beekeepers to take a class," he said. "I've had a lot of people come and take my class who were surprised at the amount of work that actually goes into keeping bees."

There is far more to beekeeping, McLaughlin said, than simply purchasing a colony and dumping them into a hive.

For example, new colonies often arrive before natural nectar is flowing. That means beekeepers must be constantly feeding the bees a special sugar syrup until they can go and forage on their own.

"The survivability of a colony increases dramatically with education," he said. "Learning before you get bees goes a long way to an enjoyable first year versus a miserable year."

When it comes to bees, he said, the learning never stops.

The Internet, the Maine Beekeepers Association and local bee clubs are all good sources for information.

Beekeepers with existing, overwintered colonies should be checking the hives now. Queens have started laying and rearing brood, meaning they need specially prepared sugar-based food to supplement any honey stores.

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ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN

Mike Bahner of Bahner Farm does some of the mobility exercises that should help him heal after a table saw nearly severed his thumb and index finger. Surgeons in Boston were able to reattach the digits during a seven-hour operation on Jan. 23.

'It's a community thing'

Friends help farmer, family after home renovation accident

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

BELMONT — One minute, Mike Bahner of Bahner Farm was home alone, renovating the family bathroom. The next, after a piece of wood he was cutting bound in his table saw, the 33-year-old farmer's right hand was jerked into the blade.

It happened in a split second, leaving Bahner's thumb dangling by a small strip of skin and with his index finger also in bad shape after the saw cut through its tendons, nerves and arteries.

"It's hard for me when I look into my memory to see what happened," Bahner said of the Sunday, Jan. 23, accident. "It was the most painful thing I've ever experienced."

Bahner drove himself to Waldo County General Hospital in Belfast, where he was soon put on a LifeFlight of Maine helicopter for a quick trip to Massachusetts General Hospital in

Boston. There, he endured a seven-hour surgery to reattach the severed thumb and save his index finger. His wife and fellow farmer, Christa Bahner, got there as soon as she could to support Mike in his nearly weeklong hospital stay, during which time he had to stay in a room heated to 90 degrees to help his hand heal.

Meanwhile, back in Maine, the community leaped into action to help the family however they could. The Bahners are well known around Waldo County. They purchased their Belmont farm in 2009 and now grow about five acres of produce. They also have an active CSA program that supplies produce to many people in the area.

Customers and friends shared the news of the accident and volunteered to help care for Lizzie, who is nearly 5, and Nicky, who is 2 years old. A farmer friend set up an account to provide the family with home-cooked dinners through



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Mike Bahner almost severed his thumb and index finger in a table saw accident as he was working alone to renovate the bathroom at the family's 1840 farmhouse. Mike and his wife, Christa Bahner, are grateful that the community has rallied to help them with child care, meals and finishing the bathroom renovation.

the website mealtrain.com, and other handy folks figured out that the bathroom renovation still needed to get done. Prior to the accident, the Bahners moved into a friend's condo while their plumbing was torn apart, and they need to move back to their 1840 farmhouse by

March 1. So a diverse roster of people from professional carpenters to willing learners have stepped up to finish the job.

"It really is amazing how much friendship and love there is," Mike Bahner said. "When people are willing to take time
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JOCK ROBIE

Worm composting, called vermiculture, creates a natural fertilizer that makes plants more robust and disease-resistant.

Composting workshop sheds light on vermiculture

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

Creepy crawlers. Glistening, red, wiggly wigglers breeding in your basement. No matter what you think of worms, most of us don't want them in our house, eating our food. Yet a growing swath of gardeners are realizing that a key to lush, vibrant crops lies in worm composting.

Setting up a worm den in your basement is one way to harvest your own worm manure, a natural fertilizer that enriches vegetable gardens, flower gardens and blueberries.

"I am fascinated by it. I've decided to take it on for

the rest of my life," vermiculturalist Jock Robie, a Gorham retiree who swears by the science, said.

He will teach a workshop on worm bin harvesting Thursday, Feb. 18, at Meryspring Nature Center in Camden. During the workshop, in addition to educating on worm dens, he will also teach people how to make worm tea: "The liquid form of the good stuff," he said, which has the same epic effect on soil.

Robie has been involved in vermiculture for several years. In 2008 he started experimenting with worm waste, called casting, and result were immediate.

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'We have more stuff than smarts'

Thorndike couple has built a business and life out of their collections

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

THORNDIKE — When 85-year-old Bea Bryant leads you on a tour of the Bryant Stove Shop and Museum, you follow her with pleasure — even when she steps into a dimly lit, quiet room where the walls are lined with hundreds of dolls who all seem to be waiting for something.

When she flips a switch that turns on the doll circus she and her husband, 84-year-old Joe, have created, you see what they've been waiting for. The room fills with jolly, rollicking circus music and all manner of dancing dolls, stuffed animals and miniature carnival rides. There's a ferris wheel, a carousel and much, much more.

The circus was born of Bea's indefatigable love of collecting old dolls at Florida flea markets and yard sales and her husband's genius at tinkering with small motors and bicycle chains.

For years, it has delighted visitors to the stove shop and museum with its music, motion and whimsy, and in some ways it seems like a perfect metaphor for the couple's long marriage and business partnership. Together, Bea and Joe Bryant have a gift for finding value in objects that in other hands might have been thrown out and the creativity and vision to make that value apparent to many.

"We always collect stuff," Joe said. "We have more stuff than smarts."

But people who love old stoves, cars, music machines such as calliopes and other old things likely disagree.

"Just because things are new doesn't make them better, I don't



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Bea Bryant (right), 85, her husband Joe Bryant, 84, at the Bryant Stove Museum where they refurbish, exhibit and sell old stoves. Bea and Joe run the shop, a doll-making and a museum that has many old stoves, cars and a number of old music-making machines.

think," Bea said.

The Bryants were high school sweethearts, who graduated together from Freedom Academy in 1949. They were married in 1950.

"I was all set to be a missionary," Bea recalled. "But he asked me to marry him, so I stayed home."

At first, Joe worked at the family steel fabrication business, Bryant Steel Works. But in the 1960s, Bea noticed how many out-of-state companies were coming up to Maine to purchase old stoves, pianos and other antiques by the truckload and then hauling them out again to sell.

"We wanted to save the stoves so we could have something in Maine to be proud of," she said. "We wanted to

keep antiques in Maine."

They began purchasing and restoring old cast-iron cookstoves and parlor stoves that modernizing Mainers didn't want anymore. Then they found a Vermont man who had saved hundreds of stoves from the dump during the 1940s.

"That really put us in the stove business," Bea said.

The business grew, with the couple learning that lots of people still love old stoves. They now employ some of their family members at the stove shop, where they purchase, sell and refurbish cookstoves and parlor stoves. Although Bea originally had wanted to staunch the flow of Maine
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