

Very soon 1,450,000 new honey bees will call Tillamook home! No reason to be nervous. They are really friendly (unless you are trying to steal their honey).

They don't just fly in, of course! They come in cardboard boxes in a form called a "nuc" which is short for "nucleus colony". A truck is bringing 145 of these NUCs from Colton, Oregon on April 23rd. Each nuc contains five frames mostly covered with bees, about ten thousand per nuc. One frame is filled with pollen and nectar or honey. Others are filled with eggs, larva, and capped brood. There is one queen in this mini-colony and she's busy laying eggs. Nurse bees are actively feeding larva and other workers are trying to maintain the 95-degree temperature required. Can you imagine what it takes for it to be in the 40's outside and 95 inside? It's one well-orchestrated community!

You will be surprised and, perhaps, saddened to know that all 1,450,000 of these bees will be dead before the fourth of July with the exception of the queen. Don't be sad. That's their destiny. They were born to only live about forty days this time of the year and to work faithfully building colonies that will total over seven million bees by mid-summer, about 50,000 bees per colony. The summer bees will collect the nectar, make honey, and produce the bees that will produce the winter bees to continue on the life cycle of the honey bee colonies. Based on fossils, it's been going on like this for a hundred million years!

The sixty-two of us beekeepers getting NUCs are as excited as children at Christmas. Hope springs eternal that this year we will do everything right and the colony will still be alive this time next year. There's probably at best a 50-50 chance.

Serious challenges to keeping bees alive exist. It's part science, part art, and part luck. Some things we have control over and some we don't. That's the topic for the next article I'll be sharing with you.

I'd like you to know that I am in no way trying to convince any of you you should become beekeepers. It's expensive and challenging, as I said, but from the bees we get a lot more than just honey or pollinated fruit trees. We get another glimpse of the awesomeness of nature.

There are two upcoming events you need to be aware of. First, we will be at the Home and Garden Show. Please stop by, see the bees and their hive. Local honey will be for sale. Bring your questions.

Secondly, there is a free class which we call “To Bee or Not to Bee”. It’s an introduction to honey bees, the challenges of keeping bees in Tillamook, and what equipment it takes to keep bees. It’s Saturday, May 7th, from 1:00 to 3:30. There is more info on the home page of the website. Registration is required. It’s a fun class even if you have no interest in becoming a beekeeper.

Looking forward to seeing you at one of the two above events. In the meantime, keep taking your tablespoon of raw honey every day. Never has “medicine” tasted so good!

For additional interesting information about honey bees check out the Tillamook Beekeepers Association website: www.tillamookbeekeepers.org. Prior articles can be found in the section titled “About Bees”. Claire Moody is education director for the association and can be reached at clairemoody503@gmail.com. Come see us at the Home and Garden Show