

# How the honey’s made



This April 16 photo shows a newly purchased queen bee, shown marked with white paint on her back in a queen cage, near Langley, Wash. Worker bees eventually will eat a piece of candy placed as a cork on the back of the cage so the queen can be released for egg laying. Queens can live more than five years but their vitality declines with age.

Dean Fosdick via AP

## Spring is busy time for bees and keepers

By DEAN FOSDICK  
Associated Press

Spring is the busiest time of year for bees and their beekeepers. Queens begin laying their eggs, scouts head out of the hive to find food to replenish diminished stocks, and the rest of the workers shoulder the load in raising more brood.

For beekeepers, late summer and autumn are the primary harvest periods for honey, while winter provides a pause for equipment cleaning and repair. Spring is all about honeybee regeneration, said Jeffrey Harris, a research professor with the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

“Bees are seasonal animals that depend upon flowers,” Harris said. “You can’t grow brood without pollen, and there’s only a discreet amount of time available for blooming.”

Beekeeping seasons vary in length according to climate, of course. That ranges from about 10 weeks in Alaska to 11 months or more along the Gulf of Mexico.

“The seasons are shorter in Alaska but you can make more honey per colony,” Harris said. “Things bloom hard and daylight runs about 20 hours per day. Down here (Mississippi), it’s greatly different. We have a little winter lasting about two weeks.”

Overwintering honeybee colonies in hives is tricky but not unworkable. The key to high wintering success is ensuring that the bees are healthy at the beginning of the cold season and have enough nutrition to carry them over.

Beekeepers face colony mortality because of disease-carrying mites, moisture building up in the hives and extreme cold. Few plants will bloom outdoors in single-digit temperatures, and their absence triggers starvation.

“If bees are to starve, it’s generally in February and March,” Hollis said. “We don’t start to see much flowering down here until March.”

“Beekeepers need to provide artificial syrup and candy (pollen patties) to sustain and help them with the ups and downs of weather in the early spring.”

The four types of bees most



Dean Fosdick via AP

This April 12 photo taken near Langley, Wash., shows a beekeeper shaking a new colony of honeybees into a hive to replace wintertime losses. Shipping boxes are sold by weight. Three pound boxes, like the one shown here, contain some 10,000 honeybees.

commonly seen in North America are wild bees, bumblebees, Mason bees and honeybees.

Honeybees are among the first of the bee species to become active each year, said Andony Melathopoulos, a bee specialist with Oregon State University Extension.

“Unlike all the other bees in the U.S., they winter as a colony so they can jump into action as soon as it gets warm” — approximately 55 degrees Fahrenheit, he said. “In the middle of the winter, all the rest of the bees are in some form of dormancy, either in

the ground or in hollow stems.”

Gardeners can make their properties more hospitable by choosing plants attractive to bees, massing them in broad strips or swaths, and selecting those that flower successively, starting in early spring, Melathopoulos said.

“People should be aware that many plants with gorgeous blooms don’t always attract pollinators,” he said. “A hybrid tea rose has really no benefit to pollinators. So look out for plants that pollinators visit when strolling around your neighborhood.”

### BLOOMIN’ BLUES



Photo by Bruce Barnes

Draba verna, Spring Whitlow-grass

## Draba verna makes quick appearance

By BRUCE BARNES  
For The East Oregonian

**Name:** Spring Whitlow-grass

**Scientific name:** *Draba verna*

This little plant is so small it is seldom seen, although it grows and thrives on every continent and in most countries, and spreads prolifically. I doubt that it is a considered a weed anywhere, since it isn’t likely noticed. It is grows in nearly any soil and re-seeds itself every year, sprouting soon after the snow melts, and it also does well in tropical regions.

A botanist friend once commented that *Draba verna* was among the most efficient plants he knew of. It sprouts quickly in early spring when there is little competition, matures and blooms quickly, and has dropped its seed pod, died, and dried up in May. One botanical reference states it “thrives in sand too poor and with too little sun for larger plants, and does a small job quickly and well.”

The only reference I could find describing any purpose for the plant in North America, beyond the plant simply surviving, said it was used as a remedy for a sore under or around a fingernail or toenail. Such sores were known as a “whitlow,” hence the common plant name. Other common names include “nailwort” and “shad-blossom.” The genus name *Draba* is Latin for acrid. The species name *verna* is Latin for spring, which is quite appropriate; many years this is the first flower

I see blooming anywhere.

In England, farmers found that the best time to plant spring barley was when the Whitlow-grass started blooming.

If you want to see the plant, you must be standing still, especially when the flowers aren’t open yet. It is simply too small to see when one is moving. The first to come up have a simple thread-like stem about an inch high, with a tiny white sliver at the top forming a cylindric white roll of the folded-up petals yet to open. By late March you may be able to spot some with a two-inch stem and a flower open that is about an eighth of an inch wide. When you see the plant in flower, even crowded together as in the photo, it is easy to understand why nobody bothers to pick them, spray them or use them for anything; they are just too tiny for anyone to see or bother with.

With a hand lens or a camera with a closeup lens they become rather impressive. As in the photo, there are six tiny anthers in the middle of the flower, and 4 petals. Each petal is deeply slit down the middle to the extent that it looks more like there are eight slender flowers.

**Where to find:** Best places are along roadbanks, sidewalks, or the edge of gravel parking lots though they can be found nearly anywhere. In the past I’ve found them in my driveway and in city parks. The photo was taken on a clump of moss on a rock cliff face along the road at Umatilla Forks.

# Massive Columbia River Treaty up for review

By ROB CHANEY  
The Missoulian

Fire up half a dozen bulldozers over a summer and Canada could turn the Kootenai River away from Libby Dam and pour its water into the Columbia River.

Nobody’s planning to do that. But somebody thought it was significant enough to include in the 1964 Columbia River Treaty between the United States and Canada. Negotiators for both nations have started work rethinking that treaty, which otherwise automatically renews in 2024. In the process, they’ve stirred up much more than theoretical engineering projects.

“The original treaty had two purposes, hydro-power generation and flood-risk management,” said Jon Osborn, a medical doctor who helped organize the “One River: Ethics Matter” conference in Missoula on April 11. “But that came at great cost to the river system, to the salmon and to the

people of the basin. We have an opportunity to seek justice and stewardship. We can add a third purpose, ecosystem function, as a primary purpose of the treaty.”

The treaty affects a region the size of France. It takes in the Columbia River as it makes a huge north-south arc up through British Columbia and down through Washington and Oregon. Montana contributes the Kootenai, Flathead and Clark Fork river systems. Idaho’s Snake River touches bits of Wyoming, Utah and Nevada as it makes its way from Yellowstone National Park to its confluence with the Columbia in Washington.

Those rivers pass 68 major hydropower and flood-control dams before they reach the Pacific Ocean. The treaty obligates Canada to hold back millions of acre-feet of water to prevent floods like a 1948 disaster that ruined neighborhoods from Bonner’s Ferry, Idaho, to Portland. In return, Canada

gets the revenue from 50 percent of the hydropower produced by downstream U.S. dams. Ironically, that deal was formed at a time when both nations assumed nuclear energy would eclipse hydroelectricity as the main generation source.

The Columbia watershed touches 32 Indian tribal nations in the United States and First Nations in Canada. All of those sovereign states have treaties granting them a say in how the rivers are managed.

Brian Lipscomb is the chief executive officer of Energy Keepers, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes’ corporation managing the dam and its hydroelectricity. He said the Canal Flats area where the Kootenai and Columbia pass within half a mile of each other presents an interesting accident of geography. But that doesn’t mean it’s a good idea to re-arrange them.

“As an engineer and tribal member, I can look at Canal Flats and know that with six

bulldozers and a summer and we can turn the Kootenai River down the Columbia,” Lipscomb told the conference attendees. “That should not be a bargaining chip on either side of the conversation.”

Rather, Lipscomb wondered why CSKT has to hold water back to provide flood control in Canada, while Canada gets to use that same water to sell as hydro-power to the United States. That not only affects the economics of the Flathead dam, but hurts its ability to move water in ways that benefit native fish.

And that fish issue drives a much bigger community of people interested in reshaping the treaty. The Columbia and Snake rivers supported one of the largest wild salmon spawning runs on the planet before dams blocked their passage.

Ktunaxa First Nation Chief Alfred Joseph told of how his ancestors named the river above Columbia Lake “Red Water” for all the blood spilled during the annual

salmon harvests. The site was so well known, Stony Indian bands from Alberta would cross the Continental Divide to fish with his people, just as the Ktunaxa went east to hunt buffalo.

“When the dams came, the Ktunaxa lost our burial grounds and our salmon,” Joseph told the conference. “That’s never come up in the treaty.”

Until now. In 2001, a dozen Roman Catholic bishops produced a pastoral letter asking people to consider the damage done by dams on the Columbia watershed and seek ways to fix it. Nine years later, 15 U.S. tribes and Canadian First Nations issued a call for a seat at the table of treaty negotiations so they can add their sovereign claims to the conversation.

“We want to negotiate something that’s different and make sure we’re part of the solution going ahead,” Lipscomb said. “For all its problems, from a worldwide perspective, this treaty is

still a shining example of how two countries can work together and use a resource.”

Conference organizer Osborn said time is short to make the case that ecosystem functions are just as valuable as hydropower or flood control in Columbia River Basin management.

“The Trump and Trudeau administrations are moving forward with negotiations, so we need to make sure Montana’s interests are protected,” Osborn said. “I’m concerned that the negotiators are not in the room here. That failure to show up sends an important message. As we get closer to the deadline, it’s increasingly important to hear from people on the ground.”

Both U.S. State Department lead negotiator Jill Smail and her Canadian counterpart were invited to attend the conference. Smail will hold a public listening session in Spokane on April 25, but otherwise, few opportunities remain to participate in the official proceedings.