

Teas and Bees... And now the Trees!

By Marian Petelycky, *Quinte Chapter*

Teas and Bees was started by OWA members, Peter and Marian, as many small success stories start, with a personal passion! With Peter's love of beekeeping and my love of learning about the medicinal uses of plants, knowledge passed down from my mother, the two concepts came together, and *Teas and Bees* was formed.



As the idea and passions grew so did our desire to purchase a homestead where we could fulfill our ideas. In 2013, we purchased a small hobby farm outside of Roblin, Ontario and moved out of the city taking our bees and seeds with us.

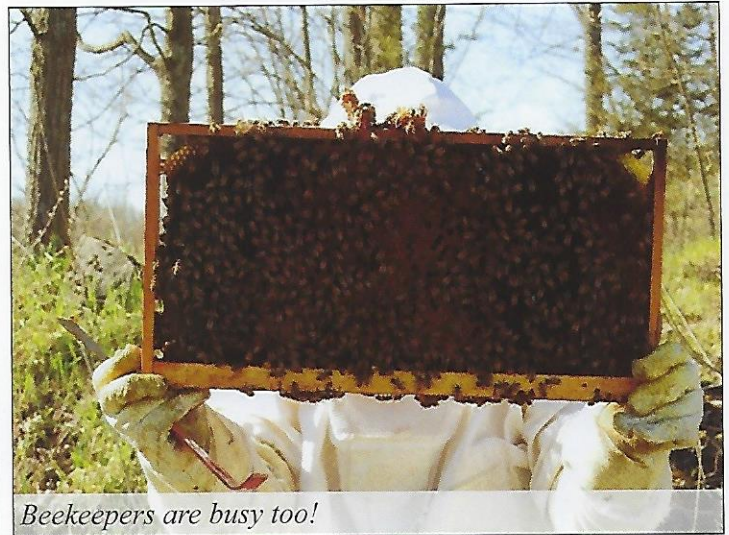
We fell in love with the farm, not for its pastures, but for its trees and its creek. We walk through the forest many times of days, amazed by the trees, their size, beauty, and the wildlife species they attract.



A honeybee at work

And then came the hard work...

In the early days, we only made gifts for our friends and family and as word got out, we would get questions about purchasing our products. We would always say no, we did not sell our products as we did not produce enough to sell. But as we acquired more hives and grew more tea ingredients, we started to have more than we could give away. We attended quality workshops on maple syrup production and honey and started offering our products for sale. We now have a selection of honey products (honey, honey blended soaps, candles, and bees wax wraps) and blended herbal tea products available for sale.



Beekeepers are busy too!

And now the trees come into our story...

About this time, we started to become more interested in the type of trees we had on the farm. We found and marked our sugar maples to see if we could make maple syrup as gifts. Also, I needed to solve a problem with the garden. We had many large black walnut trees lining the gardening plot. The juglans excreted by the roots were killing some of the plants. A decision had to be made, either move the garden or cut down the trees. Neither choice appealed to me as moving the garden would set me back several years to get another plot ready; and cutting down perfectly good trees was not an option for us. So, I decided that the garden would stay with some modifications (raised beds for all the susceptible plants) and the trees would have to contribute to the business.

After doing some research and trial and error such as harvesting walnuts (way too much work for not a lot to show for it), I came upon a couple of articles about making black walnut syrup. We were already making maple syrup, so we tried a couple of walnut trees. The first year was not a success as very little syrup was made. There were issues around filtering and overall it was considered a failure. But after more research, knowledge, and experimentation, we have found a formula that works. The walnut trees give a fraction of the sap that maples do, and the sugar content is not as high, but the flavour of the syrup is delectable – a sweet mild slightly buttery nut flavour. Mixing the walnut with the maple syrup gives it a maple butternut flavour that some people describe as butter pecan or butterscotch. The walnut trees have made their contribution and the squirrels are ecstatic that they can have their walnuts back!

In an effort to try to maximize the resources that are available to us, we use any trees that come down during storms or are cut due to hazards to buildings or infrastructure. The logs and large branches are used as the heat source for our maple syrup production, the wood burning furnace in the house and the branches and small brush are chipped for mulch on our beds and garden. Any ash from the burning of the wood is then moved to the compost to be used as a soil conditioner and as pest control for the plants that we grow. In addition, we are developing some prototypes of wooden soap dishes made from the limbs of the fallen trees to sell along with our honey soaps. And that completes the circle of life of the tree.



Peter at work in the woodlot



Teas and Bees taps both maple and walnut trees for syrup

The addition of the maple products (syrup and sugars) and the maple walnut syrup has greatly increased our offerings to sell. We look forward to researching more tree products for *Teas and Bees*.

Our interest in trees has spawned an interest into some of the life under them, namely mushrooms. We have found many types including morels. It seems that morels are elusive and do not see fit to appear in the same place every year! While not likely to add to our products offering with *Teas and Bees*, they do provide us with new adventures. In fact, after a Quinte chapter mushroom course, we have ventured into spawning mushroom varieties using wood logs and chips. It is not as easy as it sounds as the perfect growing spots are like the Goldilocks

of the forest: not too wet, not too dry, not too much sun, not too much shade. We know there is a place somewhere in the forest out there... Hopefully we will be able to find it every year.

So maybe in a couple of years our name will change from *Teas and Bees* to *Teas, Bees, and the Trees!*



Mushrooms!



Unique products from Teas and Bees



Marian and Peter, proud proprietors of Teas and Bees