

STAHLMAN BEEKEEPING

NOTES FOR 2023

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One of the pleasures of keeping bees is getting honey from your own hives. Some beekeepers consider it magical to taste that first precious drop from comb dripping with honey.

Honey for centuries has been considered a natural gift of God. We know honey was gathered in ancient Egypt from pictures as well as written documents. We know from painting on cave walls that honey was gathered well before recorded history.

There are so many uses for honey that I can not come close to covering the subject – books have been written about it.

Modern beekeepers follow a few simple steps to manage bees to store honey so it can be harvested.

Depending upon where you live, the honey harvest season will vary considerably. From what I am hearing, we have had a good honey flow this year.

I have been giving a bee talk to several clubs about the differences in honey collected by bees. It is interesting that many beekeepers have no idea about the great variety of tastes honey has.

First, honey is collected from the nectar secreted by plants. There are some unique plants that provide varietal honey – “Honey that is identified as collected from a single source.” For most beekeepers, the nectar gathered

IMPORTANT POINTS

Honey has uses beyond being a sweetener. It has been reputed to be a magical gift from the Gods.

Eva Crane, the author of “The Archaeology of Beekeeping” and “The History of Beekeeping” traces honey gathering back to pre-history.

She helps us follow the importance placed on honeybees from Egypt and ancient Greece into the middle-ages of Europe.

Modern beekeepers are blessed with that legacy.

Pure honey comes from nectar collected by honeybees.

Do you know that honey is used in the following ways:

- It has healing qualities. Medicinal values are often over-looked by many beekeepers.
- It is deeply rooted in some religious ceremonies.
- It is used in many products sold as beauty treatments –
 - Hand lotions
 - Soap
 - Moisturizers

Honey retains moisture and has anti-microbial properties!

by bees is brought back to the hive from many sources and when we cannot identify any particular source it is identified as wildflower honey.

Wildflower honey collected in one region of the country will be quite different from another region. The time the nectar is collected will vary with plants in bloom.

To identify honey by color is not an accurate way to determine the sources. So much honey light in color is attributed to clover and sold as such. Most honey sold in retail outlets provided by honey packers is blended from various sources. Strong flavored honey can be blended with lighter and mild honey sources such as clover. The reason I mention this is one can notice honey bottle labels with the countries of origin. The honey might not have been collected in the U.S. but blended with U.S. honey by packers. The objective is to produce a mild tasting honey light in color that is uniform and will have good shelf life.

Honey that has been heated to allow it to pass thru filters removes many of the identifying features that can be found in raw honey such as pollen grains. Pollen grains in honey help in its identification.

The most important attribute of honey is moisture content. Beekeepers on occasion deal with fermentation and granulation. I have written about both in previous articles but it is a subject worth repeating.

A characteristic of honey is to granulate (to become a solid). Some beekeepers are concerned that their honey looks cloudy and I have known of some customers that throw away perfectly good honey because it granulated in the jar.

Nothing is wrong with granulated honey! Some honey sources granulate quickly such as canola. Some take a long time to granulate such as tupelo.



Light does not penetrate thru granulated honey. Granulated honey does not flow and when it remains in a frame, it is almost impossible to get it out without warming the honey in the comb which reduces the strength of the wax in the comb.

Many have discovered the value of using granulated honey. Since it is not as messy as liquid honey, it can be spread easily with a knife onto toast. A spoon of honey can be placed into a cup of coffee to sweeten it. Some sell honey as creamed honey which has a smoother consistency somewhat like butter.

If honey does granulate, it is rather easy to get it back to a liquid state by heating it. A warning – honey can be over heated and ruined. Most honey produced by hobby beekeepers is processed at temperatures in the range of 80° F. to 110°F. Commercial honey is often heated to 160° to retard granulation. The most frequent method to get it back to a liquid state is to place a jar

of granulated honey in a pan of water and warm it gently. Some have used a microwave to ungradulate honey with disastrous results especially if the honey is in plastic bottles. One caution – Over heated honey darkens and flavor is affected. Honey will carmalize if it gets too hot.

Fermentation is a more difficult problem to deal with. Fermentation is caused by high moisture levels in honey (more than 18.6% moisture). If one tastes fermentated honey, it will be sour. Jars with fermented honey leak and the lid may bulge. Fermentation is caused by yeast organisms in honey.

However, there is one time honored use of fermentation -- making mead. Mead was probably the first fermented drink known to man – so many references to this ancient drink can be found on line. From Charles Butler's recipe in his book published in 1706 to more modern recipes that can be found in a search for making mead. It is interesting that one can have different flavors based on the variety of honey used. The process is like that used to make wine or beer.

Honey is best displayed with a light behind jars – see the photo at the beginning of this article.

Honey

At one time I collected samples from every barrel of honey I produced. I could track each batch of honey I sold if a problem developed. It is surprising that most of the honey changed color over many years of storage. Light colored honeys became darker. I have heard that honey does not go bad. This is mostly true but it does change with time.

Honey has characteristics: Color, viscosity, taste, pollen, granulation rates, density and specific gravity, and sucrose solutions that all can be examined for authenticity. We are rather lax when it comes to identifying honey in the U.S. No actual honey standard exists other than identifying adulterated honey. There are labeling laws regarding honey. The use of honey bees or a bear on a label is legal and the contents of the bottle are identified. The word syrup is used with words such as honey flavored.

I am sharing two bottles of what one would think is honey. This are your competition: Bottle used: the standard 8 oz. plastic bear that honey is sold in.

Pretty labels: Hive Five & Junior Bear. Honey used along with syrup on the label. Usually the contents of a bottle are listed in the order of Ingredients. The volume of corn syrup used and the amount of honey added is not on the lable – nothing about how much corn syrup vs. honey.

On these bottles the ingredients are listed: High Fructose Corn Syrup, Corn Syrup and Honey for the Junior bear label. For the Hive Five: Corn Syrup and Honey!

The price for an 8 oz. bottle at the dollar store where I bought them was \$1.00 each two years ago. They still are as liquid as when they were purchased. I guess the price would now be \$1.25.



Honey flavored Syrup dressed up to look like honey.



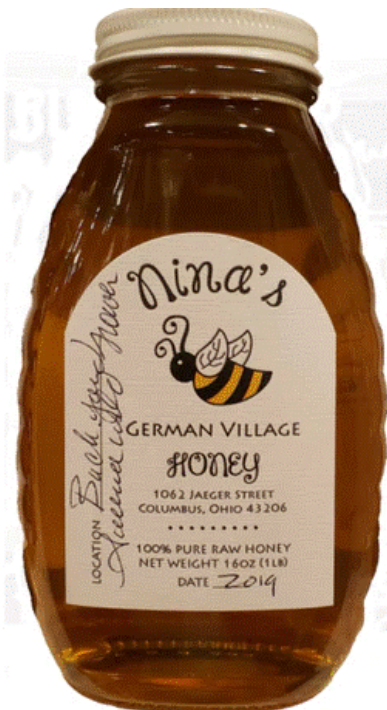
There is a trend to create artificial honey in today's market place.

Corn syrup is cheap. Mixing a small amount of honey into the corn syrup allows producers to sell it as long as the word Syrup is larger than the word honey.

Marketing honey is a big thing! Honey producers for the most part pay no more than necessary to buy large quantities of honey. Current prices for honey is established by a world market. Thus, countries of origin (Argentina etc.) sell honey for far less than American beekeepers can produce it.

U.S. beekeepers bottling and selling their own honey need to point out the

value of honey harvested locally. I listened to a bee presentation recently that included the point – *How you bottle your honey makes all the difference in the world.* Value is added to a product when it is presented with a great label and offers something special.



This is a bottle of honey being sold by Nina Bagley in Columbus, Ohio. She lives and keeps bees in German Village. Does honey produced in German Village have sale appeal? She has built up a very interesting business selling local honey. You may read articles in Bee Culture Magazine she has written. Her honey by the way is also sold on line:

<https://statehouseshop.com/products/ninas-german-village-honey-2019>