

Cleaning up your Honey

I thought that I would take a few minutes to go over some of the basics in the preparation of honey that has come from the hive and is on the way to the bottle. Many of the seasoned beekeepers know this stuff already but I thought that it would be a good time to refresh our memories as well as to inform the new beekeepers some of the pitfalls to avoid in the preparation of their products. I would expect that most all of the beekeepers will be using their honey for gifts at some point in time. This is a good standard to use in the processing of all your products because if you can produce a gift quality honey it will be fit for selling or entering in the state fair competition. Quality honey starts in the care it gets when we start pulling it off the hive. Excess smoke or smoke of the wrong type can flavor the honey and degrade the taste. Remember that the best product is still in the hive and still in the comb. Whatever we do to it only makes things worse. Supers should be removed and taken to a clean and odor free spot for the extracting process. Honey has the

ability to pick up flavors from many sources. I once filled a pickle jar with honey and even though the jar was scrubbed clean it still flavored the honey.

Whatever method that you use in the extracting process you will need to make some decisions on the amount of debris that you will leave in the honey. Most American consumers prefer liquid honey that is free of any visible particles. It is quite possible to leave particles of wax cappings in the honey and still produce an attractive product. I have found that if there are one or two pieces of wax or comb it looks like the product is unfinished. If you leave more wax in then it looks intentional and people will recognize it as part of the product. In fact many people will look for wax particles in honey that is sold as raw honey to verify authenticity. Raw honey in this style won't win any fair prizes but can make some nice gifts. If you choose to filter the honey to remove all of the debris a fine nylon cloth will be quite useful in the process. I used some strainer cloth that I got out of a beekeeping catalog and found that it did the job quite well. I also found that a fine mesh nylon that you can find in the bargain bin at the fabric store works just as well and is a lot less expensive. Synthetic fabric is better than natural fibers because natural fibers can leave particles of lint in the finished product while synthetic fibers are so long that they are locked into the weave of the fabric. I have found that it is helpful to filter the honey that has been extracted through a kitchen strainer; this keeps the cloth from becoming clogged too soon. One of these can be found in the house wares section of the grocery store. Most all kitchens have them as well but it has been my

experience that removing things from the kitchen for the honey processing is not the smartest thing that the beekeeper can do. There is a relationship between wax, propolis, and domestic tranquility that could be the subject on an entire newsletter.

Free fall of the honey is something else to avoid and usually comes with the filtering of the honey as the honey drips off the bottom of the filter. This puts many small bubbles into the honey that eventually come to the surface as froth or will make your honey cloudy in the jar until the froth comes out on the top. If possible let the filter cloth rest on the surface of the honey that has been filtered so that the honey can slide down the filter cloth and not drip into the container. Warming the honey can aid in the filtering and speed up the process tremendously. Avoid freefall in the bottling process as well by using the side of the jar to let the honey flow down to the bottom. The final step in the process is to look through the glass to spot anything that missed the filter. Pulling out the stray particles with a soda straw is a pretty easy task. Hold your finger over the end of the straw and insert it to the point just above the particle and remove your finger, the particle will go right into the straw and can be easily removed. Lastly, don't forget to polish the jar when you are all done. *Steve Vectors*