

HARVEST REPORTS

Well gang, the crop is in for those of us that took honey this year. Most everyone that I have talked to this fall seems to be satisfied with the way things turned out although honey production seemed to be lower than average in most areas of south central. Reports are that conditions on the Kenai Peninsula were good this year and production was up for that area. As many of you know last year was an exceptional year in many areas so for some beekeepers the difference in crops comparing last and this year may be all the data that they have to work with.

I think that it is a good practice to keep an eye on your beekeeping neighbors and note how their production was to let you know if the year was good. So many times we try something different and the bees produce honey in spite of what we do to them. If your production was low and everyone else did well it may be time to try to figure out why that could be. Many factors come to mind from swarm control to brood diseases. Also keep in mind that soil moisture and the timing of rainfall can play a major roll in production of nectar. I think that the lack of rain in the early summer played a big part in the lack of available nectar. When the rain finally came it seemed to not let up enough for the bees to finish the flow and fully cure the nectar into ripe honey. A number of beekeepers reported that the bees just didn't seem willing to cap off the frames and that moisture was fairly high. In looking over the fair entries this year, I did notice that the moisture content was higher this year than in the last few years. This leads into the next article...

WET HONEY

I have had several people contact me about what to do with honey that seems too runny.

1. Should I try to dry it?

Trying to dry honey that has been extracted can be a pretty tough thing to do but it can be done. It is better to dry the honey in the frames before you extract. The surface of the honey is where it does the drying and the most surface exposed is on the face of the frame. Stacking the supers up so that a fan can circulate air through them can make a big difference. I used this method on a number of supers this year that were not capped and combined air flow with a room dehumidifier and pulled several percentage points of water out of the honey. Once the honey is extracted it is tough to get it to dry out without adding heat and time into the

equation. Heat for any lengthy time will darken honey, remove flavor, and denature enzymes. The deeper the bucket the less surface area is exposed to air and the longer it will take to dry.

2. Should I mix it with my thicker honey?

If you have some very dry honey this might be the thing to do with it. Before you do this it would be very helpful to know what the moisture levels are in each batch and do a small mix to see if the numbers work out right. I worry a lot if honey is above 20% moisture content. Sugar tolerant yeasts that are naturally present in honey can begin to grow and we all should know that yeast growing in a sweet plant juice yields wine or vinegar. Both of these are pretty nice products if the brewer controls the process but if you just let the honey ferment on its own the results will be far from palatable. (I will save mead making for another newsletter) Tang made some good honey vinegar and perhaps she will work up a how to make vinegar article for some future newsletter as well.

3. How should I bottle it?

This honey can be bottled like any other honey but realize that it has a shorter shelf life and shouldn't be sold as regular honey because the consumer expects honey to be shelf stable and technically it could be argued that it is not even honey because it is not fully cured yet. Probably best to call it a syrup, nectar, or something other than honey. However, wet honey generally has better flavor and smells better than fully cured honey. It makes great syrups and toppings as well as sweetener for teas, oatmeal, and the like

4. How should I store it?

From the books that I have read, wet honey will not ferment if it is stored at temperatures below 50 degrees. Apparently, yeast needs a bit of a temperature to make it go. Also it can be pasteurized but that pulls aroma and flavor out.

One thing to think about is that honey when it crystallizes increases in moisture content as the solids (sugar molecules) leave the moisture behind as they build into crystals. Depending on how the honey sets up the free moisture can build by three or four percent quite easily. This is something to consider if you mixed the wet with the dry honey and got the total batch down to 18 or 19 percent moisture. Make sure that it is less likely to crystallize by filtering it pretty well and heating it up prior to storage. I don't mean to imply that this heat is the heat of pasteurization but rather the heat to retard crystal formation. Somewhere

in the area of 120 to 125 degrees should be sufficient to keep it liquid for a number of months. While I am not sure what the temperature needs to be to pasteurize honey I would expect it to be in the range of 160 degrees or so.

If you would like to have your honey measured for water content bring some to the meeting or send a sample to Steve at the return address on this newsletter. You can put some honey in a soda straw and heat seal the ends of the straw. Stick it in a zip lock bag in case it leaks and mail it off. Testing requires about a drop of honey, so a half-length straw is more than enough to do the job.

Classroom Presentations

Well it is that time of year again. School has started and teachers are looking for interesting speakers to address young minds. If you should be so lucky to have the opportunity to address classes of students don't pass it up. It can be a real good time.

I usually spend about an hour in the class with the kids and start with discussions of what a honeybee is and go from there to why we have bees and what they do for us on this planet of ours. Most of the children are surprised to find out that about a third of our food crops are pollinated crops and it is almost always the really tasty ones. Be sure to name some of the foods that they would like, apples, watermelons and things like that. Kids are fascinated with the sting of a honeybee so expect to spend some time in that area of discussion. I try to let the children know that we breed the bees for gentle behavior and that the honeybee has no attitude issues like the yellow jackets. I do a short math lesson about the number of stings it takes to get killed by a bunch of bees because someone always wants to know and usually will ask. 7 to 10 stings per pound is the figure that I use which is pretty easy to figure out the number of bees that would have to sting me. I figure somewhere around 1,500 stings and let them know that I would have to roll around in a hive to get that many

Pictures are great as well as the tools that we use. I usually go into the class with a hive and a box of beekeeping paraphernalia on a hand truck or two wheel dolly. I can get it all in one trip which lets you know about how much stuff you need to bring. My hive has a deep and a medium super with some foundation as well as drawn comb. It is really handy to have something to

show the kids when you are explaining the life cycle of the bee and the activities of the hive. Pictures are great and if you can bring a set. I use the study prints that Dadant sells which are the same prints that we have in the demonstration booth at the fair. Mine are not framed and they are easy to hang up on the chalk board as I talk about them. I generally don't talk about all of them but it is handy to have props to get you back on track if you lose your place in your presentation.

Definitely bring your smoker and your veil. Children love to touch things and see things up close. I also bring a box of burr comb so that there are things to pass around the classroom.

I also bring a box of spoons and a bottle of honey for the kids to taste if I don't have a frame that has not been extracted yet. If you are lucky enough to have a frame of honey you can uncap with a fork and offer samples of real honey right off the face of the comb. It is a real hit!

Steve Vectors