

Processing Honey for the Show Table

Always ensure that honey supers are never put on the ground. This is a food item and should always be kept and handled hygienically. It is acceptable to place supers on upturned roofs or on stands. When taking honey supers off hives for your honey harvest it is best to keep the supers covered at all times to prevent them filling up with bees. I have white, light weight plastic lids. I put one on the bottom and one on the top of the super so they are completely sealed when I carry them to my vehicle.

I like to plan my diary so that when I take honey off my hives I am available to extract it as soon as possible. Fairly late in the evening I will put clearer boards on. I prefer not to use Porter bee escapes because I have had problems in the past with bees getting stuck. Also, if it is a large colony, they do not allow bees to exit the supers fast enough. Early the next day I will collect the supers, as described above, and put them in my vehicle. I always have a clean lid in the back of my Land Rover that I put the super on to and then cover immediately with another lid. Inevitably, the vehicle fills up with bees so as I drive across my field I leave all the windows and the back door open so that most of the bees are blown out as I drive away.

Equally, when I arrive home, I keep all supers covered at all times to prevent bees going into them. When I put the supers down on the floor at home they are always placed on a white lid to keep the floor clean and I use another lid to cover the stack of supers.

I try to extract the honey the same day as I take it off the hive. The longer you leave it hanging around the more likely it is to either crystallise or become cold and it will be harder and less efficient to extract. If it does crystallise or become difficult to extract you can put it back in your vehicle and leave it in the sunshine on a hot sunny day. However, be careful that it is not a boiling hot day or the wax will become too soft and collapse when you put the frame in the extractor and spin.

In most honey extractors the honey will run down the sides of the tank, through a filter which takes out the big pieces of wax and into a settling tank. As the honey builds up in the settling tank, you will need to run it off into 30lb buckets. When you buy honey filters you can get a set of three that fit over a standard 30lb bucket. These are 200 micron, 400 micron and 600 micron. For standard honey that I wish to sell I use a 400 micron filter. The smaller the number, ie 200, the finer the filter and the more pollen will be filtered out of the honey. This is not always a good thing as some people buy honey expressly to have the pollen in an attempt to counter the effects of hay fever. So, if I am selling honey I tend to use a bigger filter. However, if I am intending to put honey into a competition I want it to sparkle and be as pure as possible so I will use a 200 micron filter.

Producing Honey for the Show Table

If you are intending to enter your honey in local Honey Shows here are a few tips that will ensure that the Show Judge looks favourably on your entry.

Usually, a Schedule will ask you to enter two one pound jars of honey. You need to make sure that everything about these two jars and lids are identical. Certainly the colour should be identical and ideally it should come from the same batch. The lids and jars should match exactly and have no flaws in them. The inside of the lid should be clean. The surface of the honey should be flawless and have no foam or bubbles on it. There should be no incipient granulation (where the honey is just starting to crystallise).

The judge will hold a torch behind the glass of the jar and any incipient granulation will show up. If you suspect that your honey is starting to crystallise, you should warm it gently — approximately 45 to 50 degrees in the oven — until the honey is clear and the crystals have dissolved. The judge will smell the aroma of the honey as he takes the lid off. In order to conserve the aroma you should not take the lid off the honey for several days before entering it into the Show. This means that it should be transported with the utmost care to ensure the lid stays clean. Polish the glass to ensure there are no finger prints on it. The entry number should be stuck two cms above the base of the jar. The judge will weigh each jar and if it is not up to weight it will be discarded.

Best of luck!

Statutory Regulations for Selling Honey

All the information below on the regulations concerning selling honey have been lifted from the Trading Standards Institute website from the Section specifically concerned with selling Honey:

Honey that is prepacked should be labelled with the following:

- the name
- the name or trade name and address of the producer or responsible food business operator
- the country or countries of origin
- any special storage conditions
- a best-before date
- a lot mark
- the weight

Durability indication and storage conditions

- A durability indication in the form of a 'best before' date must be applied to prepacked honey. Honey that is intended to have a shelf life in excess of three months is required to be marked with at least a month and a year, such as 'Best before end Nov 2017'. However, in order to be able to identify a particular batch of

honey (see below), you may wish to also include the day - for example, 'Best before 30 Nov 2017.

- Storage conditions that need to be observed for the food to maintain its quality until the date shown must also be marked on the label.

Lot marking

- Each jar of honey should have a code on it that identifies it with a single batch for example, this could be all the honey that is packed in one day. You can use a best-before date (if it indicates at least a day and month), a number, or some other code. If you do not use a date, it may be best to put an 'L' in front of the code to make it clear that it is a lot mark. The lot mark can appear anywhere on the jar.
- Honey sold only from the premises on which it was packed does not need to be lot-marked. However, it is advisable to lot-mark all jars regardless so that the honey can be easily traced back to the batch from which it came.

General provisions

- Any information required to be given must appear either on the packaging on a label attached to the packaging, or on a label clearly visible through the packaging. The ticket or label must be easy to understand and indelible. Such information must not be hidden, obscured or interrupted by any other written or pictorial matter.
- Where honey is sold loose or prepacked for direct sale (sold from the premises on which it was packed or a mobile stall or vehicle used by the business), the labelling information may appear on a label, ticket or notice that can be clearly seen by the purchaser.
- Where honey is sold other than to the ultimate consumer, the required labelling information may be provided in an accompanying commercial document.

Weight marking

- Packed honey must show a metric weight marking, and may show an imperial weight mark in addition to the compulsory metric marking. The metric indication must be more prominent, and for most packs must be at least 4 mm high. The imperial marking must be no larger than the metric one. Note that the quantity shown should be the net weight - that is, the weight of the honey without the jar, lid and label.
- The weight marking and name of the food should be shown in the same field of vision. There is a minimum font size of 12 mm for mandatory information. As letters of the alphabet are inevitably of different sizes, the 12 mm refers to the height of a lower case 'x' (usually an 8-point font).
- Individual portions of 25 g or less are exempt from compulsory weight declarations.
- Please see 'Packaged goods: average quantity' for more information.

Organic claims

- If you are marketing your honey as organic, please see 'Labelling and describing organic food' which explains the extra legal controls that apply.

Voluntary labelling

- Members of the British Honey Importers and Packers Association (BHIPA) adhere to a voluntary code of practice whereby all honey on retail sale includes a warning statement that honey is 'Unsuitable for children under 12 months'. This is a precautionary measure against possible infant botulism, which could potentially arise from the presence of Clostridium botulinum spores in honey. Although this is not a statutory requirement, the trading standards service supports this voluntary warning for infants under twelve months.
- If the Best Before date is a specific date eg 26th March 2024 then you do not require a Lot Number. If the Best Before date is simply a month and a year eg March 2024 then you do need a Lot Number.
- If you are selling honey you should use new jars and lids. If you are simply producing honey for yourself and to give to friends you can wash out jam jars and re-use them. With both new jars and used jars, they should be thoroughly washed — in the dishwasher — or washed by hand and put in the oven on 100C to dry and sterilise them. When you fill jars you should fill up to the neck of the jar and, once the lid is on, you should not be able to see any daylight between the honey and the lid and it should certainly not weigh less than the stated weight on the label. If you are selling honey at shops it will sell better if you have an attractive label but it must contain all the above Statutory information, You should use a tamper proof label and it is a good idea to put a granulation label on the back of the jar.

Processing Wax for the Show Table

Uncapping comb: I prefer to use a fork rather than a knife as I think there is less honey wastage. A fork simply lifts the cappings off. A knife slices through the comb and the honey. I use a Combcapper Uncapping Frame Rest (£31.85 a few years ago) which I bought from Mann Lake – now Bee Equipment Ltd UK – which fits a 5 US gallon bucket. I line the bucket beforehand with a net sack so the cappings fall into the bucket and are caught in the sack. When I have finished uncapping, I tie a cord around the net sack of cappings and suspend it over the bucket to let the honey drip from the cappings into the bucket. I leave it for a few days and then filter the honey and put it in jars. This honey can be used either for cooking or making mead.

The cappings need to be washed in pure water without chlorine. You can use rain water, bottled water or I have a good filter on my tap which takes the chemicals out. When the cappings have been washed, this water can be used for making mead, if you wish, once it has been filtered. You need to wash

cappings because if there are sugar crystals in the cappings the wax makes tiny balls around them.

If you wish to process wax for showing, then you need to sort cappings and comb into light and dark wax. When I am transferring cappings from the net sack to the receptacle for melting, as I pick up each handful I just look quickly for any wax which is particularly dark or covered in propolis and separate it from the light wax. Propolis makes the wax opaque and cloudy and we are looking for clear, bright wax. You can use this darker wax for making furniture polish.

Put the comb or cappings into an old saucepan with warm water. Gently warm in a bain marie (I sit the saucepan of cappings in a large frying pan or bigger saucepan) until the wax has melted. Or you can put them with warm water in a bucket or bowl and put them in the oven to melt at about 75 degrees. I have a honey warming cabinet made by Mike Ticehurst which has a thermostat which allows me to set the temperature and leave it. If you put wax in the oven you should use a meat thermometer with an alarm set at about 80C so that if the oven starts to get too hot you can turn it down. Wax should never exceed 90 C or it will become dark in colour and useless for showing. The only thing to do with dark wax is to make furniture polish.

When the wax is completely melted, take a metal coat hanger and shape it into a loop to fit over the bowl or bucket you are using to strain the wax into. Always put newspaper down to protect worktops when working with wax. Take an old pair of tights or buy cheap ones from Pound Shop and slip over the metal loop to act as a filter. Pour the wax and water mixture through the tights into the bowl. You will need a stick or an old knife to make an indentation in the tights or the water and wax mixture will overflow or bounce off. At the first filter you will get all sorts of black muck come out of the wax. It is important not to use a fine filter at this stage because the muck will clog the filter and it will take ages to go through. In the bucket the water and wax will separate, water on the bottom and wax on the top. This makes it much easier to get the set wax out of the bucket.

Leave to set. I use a plastic bucket because the sides have some give in them and the wax can be released by gently squeezing them. If there is any difficulty, put the bucket in the fridge for a couple of hours for the wax to shrink away from the sides. If still difficult, put the bucket in the freezer and then the wax will contract and fall out.

This is the first and main filter of the wax. If you look at the underside of the wax, if it was particularly dirty, you will see a thin black band where the impurities have settled to the base of the wax. You can either get a sharp knife and cut this layer off or you can melt the wax and process again, exactly as the first time but when you get to the stage to filter the wax put a clean face wipe which has been rinsed in clean water over the tights and filter again. This should take out the majority of impurities and each time you filter you will achieve cleaner wax. However, the colour will only lighten to a certain degree.

If you have brown wax it will stay brown – albeit clean – so it is important to sort your wax by colour at the beginning of the process. If you want light coloured finished wax then you have to make sure you take the pieces of dark wax out and process it separately. Eventually, you will have a light coloured, clean block of wax.

A large block of wax can be difficult to use in recipes that require a relatively small amount of wax so what I do is melt the block of wax in a jug without water. When it is all melted, I pour it into one ounce block moulds so it is ready to weigh out for the recipes I use.

When you have arrived at clean wax that you decide to show as a block, melt it in the oven. A class for a block of wax will often specify the weight, eg 454g. I put the container I am going to pour the wax into on the scales and weigh the wax as I am pouring it in. I would probably put 475g in my mould to ensure it is well in the specified weight. Put the wax back in the oven, turn the oven off and leave the wax in the oven to cool slowly. This will ensure an even surface as the wax cools. The next morning, take it out and allow to cool further to room temperature. Then repeat the steps above to release it from the bucket.

Always choose your best wax for making candles and one ounce blocks. Blocks will be weighed so it is important that they are up to weight. You don't need to put one ounce blocks back in the oven to cool.

NEVER POUR WARM WATER AND WAX INTO THE SINK OR DOWN THE PLUGHOLE! It will solidify and block your sink. I have a corner in the garden where I pour mine away.