



# Northwest New Jersey Beekeepers Association

*...a branch of the New Jersey Beekeepers Association*

## Harvesting Honey

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### Plan your Medications

- Honey harvesting obviously has to come after a nectar flow
- Beekeepers are medicating their colonies and in these cases follow the manufacturer's instructions as they apply to honey that will be harvested.
- If you don't have instructions – do not use the product or do the research.
- When instructions are provided, follow them scrupulously.
- You are responsible for not poisoning yourself, your family, and anyone else that may consume the fruits of your labor.

### Single Sourced or Wildflower / Honey Characteristics

- We do not have options for single source honey. Our honey is Wildflower honey.
- No two jars will taste exactly alike. Spring honey tends to be lighter in color and more floral.
- Fall batches are often a darker very earthy in flavor
- Fall honey can result in a more crystallized product because of the higher quantities of pollen in the product.

### Size and Configuration of the Honey Supers

- Nomenclature – Hive body vs. a Super
  - When a super is not a super. You can place them in the middle.
- A deep super frame weighs anywhere from 6 to 10 pounds. Some claims are that frame weighs about 10
- A short full deep could weigh up to 70 pounds
- For that's reason beekeepers often choose a medium and shallow super boxes.
- A medium super weighs about 50 pounds when full of honey and
- A shallow super weighs about 40 pounds.

### Foundationless Frames

- Most honey spun out is on a foundation. The techniques are different for Foundationless frames.

### Planning for Equipment needs - Hardware

- Queen Excluders keep queens from laying in the supers.
  - Most don't need excluders. Queens rarely lay above the brood chamber.

### Getting bees out of the box

- Chemical

- Honey Robber – Butyric Acid
  - Follow the instructions - . The MSDS sheet has these risks associated with its use: Harmful by inhalation, Harmful in contact with skin, Harmful if swallowed, Causes burns, Irritating to eyes, Irritating to respiratory system, and Irritating to skin.
  - Butyric acid derives from a fatty acid occurring in the form of esters in animal fats and plant oils, it is not some Frankenstein chemical made in gotham labs.
- Fischer's Bee Quick
  - Non-toxic blend of natural oils and herbal extracts that doesn't require a MSDS sheet.
  - All of the profits of this product go to the Eastern Apicultural Society bee research fund.
- Don't USE CARBOLIC ACID
  - Deemed toxic and apparently no longer legal – dispose of properly
- Blower
- Bee Brush
- Shake off
- Escape Board

### **Getting honey out of the comb**

- Spin
- Cut
  - Chunk honey – cut by spatula into cake sized pieces.
- Crush

*And then Strain...*

### **Warning**

Not a good idea to consume honey taken from the brood chamber.

- Any medications to treat the hive are likely there from the bees.
- Pesticides brought back from the bees have a higher concentration in the brood area.

### **Extraction**

- Extract where bees cannot access you
- Extract when warm
- Uncapping
  - Knife, Uncapping fork, Electric Knife
- Methods
  - Crush and Strain
  - Spin out
- Consider honey sitting out is hygroscopic.

### **Filtering**

- Pros and cons of Cheese cloth
- Strainers

- Use of a system of strainers – a 400 micron filter, followed by a 200 micron filter, followed by some type of super fine filtering mechanism like ‘ah hem’ women’s lingerie.
- Using a mesh like panty hose or very fine cloth will result in a crystal clear honey which is the desire for showing honey.
- Finely filtered honey also is less susceptible to crystallization because of the low particulate matter count – mostly that means it filters the pollen out of the mixture
- You can buy paint filters at a lower cost than if you buy specific filter systems from a beekeepers supply.
  - Are the paint variants any different? Are they food grade?
  - Some say that are the exact same product but I can’t say.

There are some tenants and expectations when harvesting honey.

- First, expect that things will get sticky. Harvesting honey is messy business. Cardboard covers on flat surfaces is probably a good idea.
- Harvest your honey in a closed space. If you have honey out in the open, bees and bugs will find you.
- Clean the jars, clean your hands, keep your equipment clean – everything should be kept scrupulously clean during your extracting sessions. Bring out some spoons as part of your kit. You will not be able to resist dipping into the honey and using your hands after they’ve been in your mouth is not sanitary.
- Remember to harvest your honey in a warm state and in a warm climate. We actually put our frames in an oven last time at 100 degrees. They were stored outside and the honey was so thick that without some heat, well it just wouldn’t work. Don’t be concerned, a little bit of heat will not ruin the honey, recall that honey in the hive is maintained at around 90 degrees so this won’t be detrimental at all. I’ve read that honey starts to lose its nutritive quality when heated over 160 degrees so 100 degrees leaves plenty of wiggle room.
- Honey extractors are typically available to borrow. Some frown on this practice as cross contamination between beekeepers is possible but many associations purchase an extractor strictly for the purpose of lending to its members.
- There are some schools of thought that comb should be destroyed after harvest. In fact comb in brood chambers should be destroyed too. If you are treating your hives, then it is possible that there are chemicals in wax and some beekeepers think it is a good practice to get rid of it every once in a while. A secondary thought about this is giving the bees something to do – talking about building comb, keeps them vigorous and keeps the colony healthy with a mix of bees that are working hard. It’s your preference but I put that in here for you to consider.
- Some honey could be poisonous. There are plants in nature that when harvested by the bees results in honey that cannot be consumed. I have to presume that if you are well connected in your area with other beekeepers then you’re probably aware if this exists in your geography.
- Give the bees the comb back to clean up. Put the wet frames back in the box and put them on a hive. Don’t leave them near a hive as that may induce robbing. If you’re not going to put them right on the hive, set them out in a neutral place, the bees will clean them of any excess honey.

- Honey is hygroscopic. Close up your harvested honey as soon as you can as you don't want the moisture content to exceed a threshold that will result in it fermenting down the road. If the moisture content is a concern for you, then consider the purchase of a hygrometer. They're not overly expensive and will tell you exactly how much moisture is present. In my mind, if the bees capped the honey, then it is likely to be the right moisture content.
- Keep track if you're feeding the bees as you don't want to harvest pseudo honey that derives from the sugar solution. Also, it's not appropriate to blend anything into honey and then mark it as 100% honey. Blend if you must but make sure the labeling is correct.
- One question you might ponder is how many jars will you need. A web source provided these estimates as a guideline:
  - A shallow super will typically yield between 25 and 30 pounds of honey, or 2 to 2 ½ gallons.
  - A medium (6 5/8") depth super will typically yield between 35 and 40 pounds, or 3 to 4 gallons.
  - A full-depth box will typically yield between 60 and 70 pounds, or 5 to 6 gallons.
  - The estimates will allow you to do the math based on the size bottles you're going to use.
- If you pull a honey frame and it happens to have brood stored in it, you can uncap the honey sections and spin them out, then put the brood back on the hive. This advice is for honey super frames that have brood in them, which happens sometimes, not for brood frames that have honey on them from the brood chamber.
- When using a honey extractor, it's best to start slowly and not try to reach maximum velocity immediately. Too many revolutions could cause the comb to dislodge and then you'll have a crush and strain scenario instead of a frame spin out.

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