



STAHLMAN

BEEKEEPING NOTES

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Honey Harvest

Beekeepers in the Raleigh area have for the most part extracted the spring honey crop and reports are that it is down somewhat from last year. To get liquid honey one must spin the honey out of comb with something called an extractor. Many new beekeepers have issues with harvesting honey.

The goal of this newsletter is to share information. So lets start with the finished product and finish with the equipment needed to get honey into the bottle.

I spoke this week to a book club group. They had read a book called, “The Honey Bus” by Meredith May. I did not read the book but understand it was about a young girl growing up with a beekeeping grandpa. Beekeeping activities fill many pages with facts about honeybees. The members of this group had a lot to ask about honey. They were sold on the idea that honey from beekeepers is far better than what can be bought in a store.

The questions were about the healthful benefits of honey and the process and fear that honeybees are endangered. I think I can recommend this book for any of you to read. Facts that are in the book are valid and are supported with research the author sought including a number of bee books she lists for further reading.

First, the question about raw honey vs. store bought honey. Raw liquid honey is available from local beekeepers and often labeled as such. I called this (value added honey) because local honey contains pollen. I am not sure I should say with any authority that it will cure any ailment a person may have, but the general concept exists that it is good for a number of medical issues.

The topic of organic honey also came up. I am not sure about how you would answer this question but I don't believe that honey should be labeled as organic. I see bees visiting plants sprayed with insecticides, fungicides, herbicides etc. Who knows what is in the pollen and nectar being brought back into the hive. Believe me that soot from your smoker can end up in your honey. Honey studied under polarized light reveals a number of things incorporated in honey.

The steps of removing honey from a hive are varied. I like to use a leaf blower to remove bees from my honey supers. It is simple and fast. No chemicals are involved. I just set a honey super on a support

and direct air between the frames. The power of the air blows bees out of the box. The bees gather themselves together to return to the hive entrance. The bees are not hostile as this is being done.

Brushing bees off frames is often recommended. It is time consuming and bees do become somewhat disturbed. And bees brushed off the frames usually land near your feet and bees do crawl.

Acid or Fume boards are sometimes used. A product such as “Fishcher’s Bee Quick” is used to drive the bees out of the honey super down toward the brood chamber.

Another method is the use of bee escapes. They are effective only when the weather is cooler and bees leave honey supers to move to the bee cluster below. This also takes some time to be used effectively.

Moisture is a concern when removing honey from a honey super. A moisture level above 18% can result in honey fermentation. (see *The Hive and the Honey Bee* page 548 published in 2018) I was always told it could be as high as 18.6% but some sources even drop the level below 18%.



Honey on a frame like this can be extracted after the white cappings are removed. I use the rule that I only uncap frames 2/3rd capped over as you see here.



Cappings can be removed with a hot knife or a honey scratcher. The white wax is a product of the hive and can be separated from honey. Thus a beekeeper will have both honey and wax after removing honey supers from a hive.

A number of extractors are available for hobby beekeepers. The two types available are tangential extractors and radial extractors.



Tangential extractors are usually less expensive and require two operations to remove the honey from comb. Usually a tangential extractor will have a basket to hold frames. One side of a frame of honey is spun out by centrifugal force. Then the frame must be turned around so the other side of the frame can be extracted. They are usually able to handle 2 or 4 frames at a time.

A tangential extractor is shown being used in this photo.

A Radial extractor is usually motor operated and will extract more frames at a time

Frames are placed in a reel somewhat like spokes in a wheel. Centrifugal force removes honey from both sides of a frame at the same time. If one has many hives of bees, it would be a great time saver to buy a radial extractor.

Thus, I can say that the choice really boils down to how much honey is one going to extract. I currently use a tangential extractor because I have time and only 5 hives of bees. At the end of an extracting day, I am worn out. Yes my extractor is a hand crank older model.

What do I do with the honey from my extractor?



filtering again with a finer screen.



Honey is removed from the extractor and flows thru a screen to remove the wax chips and comb parts as well as bees and bee parts from the honey.

The honey is considered raw honey at this point.

Wax and particles that get thru the screen will float above the honey in the bucket and can be removed by



Wax can easily be processed in a solar wax melter. Nice blocks of yellow wax can be collected.



Wax colors will vary with the amount of dark wax placed in the wax melter.

Cappings produce the almost white color shown here.

When a mix of cappings and dark comb are placed together in the wax melter, a darker shade of wax is the result.

Honey can be bottled and sold. Honey is unique for its many characteristics, color and taste being the most identifiable.

Spring honey is usually light in color and fall colors are generally dark in color. Some beekeepers harvest honey from hives that are fortunately located near a specific plant producing nectar. That honey such as sourwood honey is a speciality honey and highly sought after.



The bottling process is time consuming and bottles are expensive.

Now back to the book club group! They are your customers. They are looking for good honey that has health benefits. They have questions about your honey. How can you convince them that your honey is best?

They are willing to pay more for your honey because they know where it came from! Knowing the beekeeper that produced the honey is better. Local honey is best.