



honey

50 TRIED & TRUE RECIPES

Julia Rutland



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Adventure Publications
Cambridge, Minnesota

Cover and book design by Jonathan Norberg

Edited by Emily Beaumont

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Honey: 50 Tried & True Recipes

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Published by Adventure Publications

An imprint of AdventureKEEN

310 Garfield Street South

Cambridge, Minnesota 55008

(800) 678-7006

www.adventurepublications.net

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Printed in China

ISBN 978-1-64755-184-1 (pbk.); ISBN 978-1-64755-185-8 (ebook)







Acknowledgments

What a complete joy it is to work on a cookbook featuring one of my favorite foods! Many thanks to the creative people at AdventureKEEN for their encouragement and skill while shepherding this book from ideas to printed pages. Cheers to Brett Ortler, Emily Beaumont, Jonathan Norberg, and Liliane Opsomer!

As always, I want to thank my friends who are willing to taste my experiments, as well as my dear family: Dit, Emily Bishop, and Corinne, who also provided assistance.



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Honey and History

Throughout human history, honey has been a significant product used as food and medicine. Prehistoric rock paintings created during the Stone Age depict people and other animals braving the hives to collect the precious liquid. Originally, honey was extracted from wild beehives located in hollow trees or other crevices. Early beekeepers found they could entice bees to nest in trees or stumps hollowed out for that purpose. Later, upside-down baskets called skeps were made from woven straw and used to house beehives.

Early methods of beekeeping destroyed the hive and colony in the process of harvesting the honey, but improvements to hive maintenance occurred over time. In 1851, American Reverend L.L. Langstroth, building on the work of European beekeepers and others, revolutionized beekeeping with his invention of a hive with moveable frames. Langstroth's design enabled beekeepers to remove filled honeycombs without damaging the hive. His design is popular today, and Langstroth is considered the "Father of American Beekeeping."

Beehives provide more than just honey. The byproducts of honey creation have also found many uses. Beeswax was (and is) used in a many ways: as an art medium; to make candles, soap, and cosmetics; to seal letters, cheese, and other foods; to waterproof leather and fabric; and even to embalm bodies. Early scribes found that wax tablets could be written on, then scraped smooth, making them the original dry-erase boards!

Meet the Bees

A healthy hive can contain up to 60,000 bees. But despite there being so many individuals, there are three basic types of bees living in a hive: the queen, worker bees, and drones (males).

Queen Bee

- The queen is the mother of the hive and the only female that is able to reproduce.
- Queen bees are produced when eggs are placed in a longer cell and the larvae are fed only a special food known as royal jelly. If more than one queen appears in a hive, the first queen to hatch kills the others before they hatch.

- Only one queen resides in the hive except when a daughter has grown to replace the aging queen.
- Queens are genetically identical to worker bees, except they are fed royal jelly exclusively and incubated in a larger cell. Worker bees are fed a different substance, known as “bee bread.” Bee bread contains a chemical compound that affects the worker bees’ genes, making them infertile and affecting their appearance.
- The mating period lasts 1 to 2 days, and a queen may mate with up to 8 drones.
- Queens live about 2 to 3 years and can lay from 600 to 1,500 eggs per day in the peak season.
- When a hive is so prolific that the colony outgrows its space, a queen will relocate with tens of thousands of her worker bees in company, called a swarm. The remaining bees will create a new queen to revitalize the old hive.

Worker Bees

- Worker bees have a variety of roles in the hive: housekeeper, nurse, queen’s attendant, guards, collector, or forager. They also build the combs; collect pollen, nectar, and water; transform nectar to honey; and feed the queen.
- Worker bees can fly up to 15 miles per hour, in a general radius of 3 miles from the hive, to gather nectar they use to produce honey. They will visit from 50 to 500 flowers per day.
- The buzz we hear when a bee flies by is the rapid flapping of its wings, which beat up to 11,400 times per minute.
- Worker bees have a lifespan of 1 month in the summer and up to 6 months in winter. In its entire lifetime, a worker may produce only $\frac{1}{12}$ of a teaspoon of honey.
- When a foraging bee finds flower nectar, she returns to the hive and “dances” to indicate where the food source is. The bee dance uses the sun as a reference point, and a special “waggle” in the dance even indicates the quality of the nectar resources found there.

Drones

- Drones develop from eggs that are not fertilized by the queen. They cannot collect nectar or pollen, nor do they have stingers.

- A drone's only purpose is to mate with a virgin queen, a process that kills the drone.
- Remaining drones are usually not allowed to enter the hive during the winter when food sources are scarce.

How Honey Is Made

You're most likely to encounter worker bees, as they do the bulk of the work that sustains the hive: ingesting nectar from flowers and collecting pollen. (Worker bees, coincidentally, are also all female.) As they move from flower to flower, honeybees also transfer pollen, making them incredibly effective pollinators.

Once back at the hive, the gathered nectar is placed into honeycombs. The nectar from the plants the bee visited, and chemicals from within the bee's stomach, give the resulting honey its characteristics. This makes each batch of honey unique. (When bees forage from specific types of trees, such as tupelo, it can make the honey very sought-after.) But the nectar only truly becomes honey once its moisture content drops. Bees help the honey "dry out" by fanning the nectar. Bees use the resulting honey as a food source for the lean winter months; they collect pollen in order to feed it to their young and to supplement their diet.

Healthy hives often produce more honey than the bees need. Beekeepers harvest the excess by removing the caps from a frame of filled honeycomb and draining the honey. Frames are put in a centrifuge and spun to sling all the remaining honey from the comb. The comb can be placed back into the hive for the bees to fill again. Ethical and wise beekeepers leave enough honey and honeycomb in the hive for the bees so that the bees can survive the winter and reproduce before flowers bloom in spring.

More Than Just Honey

While honey is the most used and esteemed product of a beehive, there are other products/materials made by bees, and, like honey, they are also utilized as food or medicine.

Propolis is a medium to dark brown, resinous “glue” produced by bees to seal gaps in a hive. Propolis has potentially promising medical uses thanks to its antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Pollen is a source of amino acids and minerals in the bees’ diet. Different types of pollen have different amounts of amino acids, and this helps provide bees with the proteins they need.

Royal Jelly is a remarkable, creamy-white substance secreted by glands in adult worker bees. All larvae are fed royal jelly briefly, but the queen’s brood are immersed in royal jelly and fed it exclusively, which helps them become queens. Royal jelly is sold for human consumption as a supplement or used in topical or cosmetic applications.

Bee Venom is the clear liquid venom that bees inject into people, animals, or other insects and what causes the painful sting and serves as an efficient deterrent to disrupting the hive. Immunotherapy using bee venom is shown to be effective for those with bee sting allergies. With less-proven results, bee venom is used to alleviate conditions such as arthritis, nerve pain, and certain diseases.

Save the Pollinators!

Honey is a delicious and amazing product, but honeybees, along with a myriad of native bees, wasps, and flies, also play a critical role as pollinators. Gardens frequently visited by pollinators produce copious and well-shaped fruits and vegetables. Commercial growers often borrow hives for pollination to ensure adequate yields of their crops.

It’s actually easy to protect pollinators: to do so, plant a garden with insect-friendly plants; provide a shallow water source; avoid garden and landscape insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides, especially when flowers are in bloom; buy local honey; and leave weeds to grow. The plants that lawn lovers call weeds, such as clover and dandelion, provide an excellent source of pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators. And you can help pollinators even if you don’t have garden space: a container garden can easily fit on a balcony and attract pollinators.

Nutrition, Health, and Wellness

Before sugarcane was cultivated, honey was the primary sweetener and a reliable source of energy wherever honeybees were found. A 1-tablespoon serving contains 60 calories and 17 grams of carbohydrates.

Pure honey is approximately 70% sugar (40% is fructose and 30% is glucose). The remaining percentage includes another sugar, sucrose, as well as water and trace elements. The percentages will vary slightly because different types of honey have different ratios of fructose and glucose. For reference, table sugar is 50% fructose and 50% glucose.

The compounds in honey may also protect against oxidative stress and chronic inflammation that can cause a number of diseases.

Although honey has more calories than table sugar (46 per tablespoon), less is needed since it tastes sweeter. Honey, therefore, can make a good replacement for table sugar and corn syrup; however, diabetics and others with blood sugar issues should still monitor consumption carefully.

As long as honey has been used as food, it has also been used as a salve to heal wounds and burns. Honey's natural antimicrobial properties can be used topically to treat infections, and it is used orally to treat coughs, sore throats, and other ailments. The viscous consistency of honey is reported to soothe sore throats, calm stomachs and intestines, and reduce ulcers by coating irritated tissues and decreasing inflammation.

Flavors and Types of Honey

There are hundreds of varieties of honey, each based on the nectar source where the honeybee collects. Large-scale commercial honey packagers blend different types to create a uniform honey that tends to taste similar with each batch. To create single source or varietal honey, beekeepers move hives based on flower location and the type of honey they wish the bees to produce.

Popular Varieties of Honey



Acacia

Made from the blooms of the thorny black locust or false acacia tree, it is naturally resistant to crystallization.

COLOR: very pale to light gold

FLAVOR AND AROMA: lightly sweet with a subtle vanilla scent



Basswood

It is also known as linden tree and sometimes “bee tree” because the clusters of flowers produce copious nectar and a strong, sweet aroma.

COLOR: amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: floral and fruity

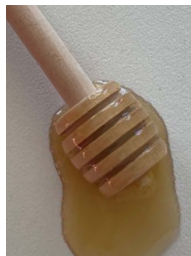


Alfalfa

This very popular honey made from the flowering legume—used as forage plants for livestock—is ideal for general use.

COLOR: pale to light amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: mild flavor and delicate floral aroma



Blueberry

This is more commonly found in the prime blueberry growing regions of the Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and Northeast.

COLOR: medium amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: mild and fruity



Avocado

Avocado tree flowers are “complete” in that they have both male and female components, but they generally do not self-pollinate because the flowers do not open at the same time.

COLOR: very dark amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: earthy and strong with a molasses flavor



Buckwheat

This is not actually a type of wheat but a pseudograin often planted as a cover crop that is tilled to improve the soil.

COLOR: extremely dark

FLAVOR AND AROMA: richly flavored with hints of malt and molasses



Clover

This is one of the most common varieties sold due to the abundance of clover groundcover, which is a favorite nectar source for bees. It's classic and all-purpose.

COLOR: almost clear to light gold

FLAVOR AND AROMA: mild, with hints of grass and vanilla



Lavender

Lavender-infused honey is a mild honey steeped with lavender flowers that give it a more obvious lavender flavor and aroma.

COLOR: gold to amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: delicate sweet flavor and floral aroma



Eucalyptus

This honey is made from the fast-growing tree that is used to make the popular essential oil and fragrance of the same name.

COLOR: varies from medium amber to dark brown

FLAVOR AND AROMA: pungent with a hint of resin and menthol



Leatherwood

This honey is produced from leatherwood trees found exclusively in Tasmania.

COLOR: gold

FLAVOR AND AROMA: floral to spicy



Fireweed

This Pacific Northwest native perennial has tall, pinkish-purple blooms and is known for its seed's ability to remain viable for a long time, usually germinating after a fire clears other plants away.

COLOR: clear to pale amber to greenish-yellow

FLAVOR AND AROMA: fruity and herbaceous



Manuka

Produced from manuka shrubs native to New Zealand and Australia, this honey is marketed largely on account of its medicinal properties. It is often unpasteurized. While all honey is antibacterial, manuka honey is especially so.

COLOR: tan to dark brown

FLAVOR AND AROMA: earthy and possible mineral aftertaste



Heather

This honey is primarily sourced from Scotland; it is made from common heather's purple flowers that bloom during a short period in late August and early September.

COLOR: dark red to dark amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: distinctively tangy, herbaceous, pungent, and/or smoky



Orange Blossom

This sweet and delicate honey is commonly found where there's a plentiful supply of citrus grown in the US, particularly in Florida and California.

COLOR: pale yellow to amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: refreshingly sweet with citrus notes



Sourwood

Found in the Appalachians, sourwood trees have a short bloom time, and the very distinctive aroma and flavor of this honey make it an artisan favorite.

COLOR: varies, pale to amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: medium sweet with spicy notes like cinnamon and cloves



Thyme

This is produced from the blossoms of thyme varieties and is popular in Greece, Sicily, and other Mediterranean locales.

COLOR: medium amber dark

FLAVOR AND AROMA: herbaceous with elements of dried fruit



Tulip Poplar

The flowers of these extremely tall and fast-growing trees provide copious dark nectar.

COLOR: very dark

FLAVOR AND AROMA: strong butter flavored to mineral flavored



Tupelo

This specialty honey comes from the white tupelo tree, which only grows in a small region in Florida and Georgia. This unique honey is one of the only types that does not crystallize due to the ratio of fructose to glucose it contains.

COLOR: medium amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: buttery sweet with scents of dried fruit



Wildflower

Also known as polyfloral honey, this type of honey is created from a wide variety of nectar sources, including unspecified wild or uncultivated flowers and trees. For this reason, wildflower honey varies widely in color and taste from season to season as different plants bloom.

COLOR: varies from gold to amber

FLAVOR AND AROMA: Gently sweet and slightly aromatic



Beware Faux Honey!

As honey's popularity has grown over the past decades, fake honey and “honey laundering” have become a real concern. Unscrupulous bottlers dilute honey with water, corn or rice syrup, and other sweeteners to produce a low-cost, phony product. To ensure you are getting a pure product, read the label. Buy honey that includes the label “True Source Certified” to ensure the honey is authentic and ethically sourced.

Types of Honey

Extracted: This is a broad term for the liquid honey withdrawn from beeswax honeycombs.

Strained vs. Filtered: Some beekeepers pour honey directly into containers without straining it. Straining honey after taking it from the hive removes unwanted particles like wax, propolis, or other hive debris. The honey contains pollen and remains slightly opaque and may contain suspended particles. Filtered honey has most of the fine particles, including pollen, removed. Filtering creates honey's popular clear appearance and makes it less likely to crystallize.

Raw: Honey taken directly from the comb with no or minimal filtering is considered raw. It may contain bits of pollen, beeswax, and bits of propolis, all of which are safe to eat. Raw honey proponents choose it because it purportedly contains higher amounts of nutrients and health-related properties. Note: Infants and children up to 18 months should not be given honey.

Pasteurized: Most honey in markets, especially from major processors, is heated and filtered. While other foods are pasteurized to kill bacteria and pathogens, honey's antibacterial properties make it a pretty unwelcoming medium for bacteria. However, some yeast cells may be present in honey, and pasteurization helps prevent potential fermentation. Yeast won't multiply in honey with a low water content but may grow if the honey contains a high amount of water, possibly fermenting. Pasteurized honey is less likely to crystallize or may do so more slowly.

Wild Honey: This product is produced by wild bees not controlled by any human intervention. Since the natural hives are not monitored, there can be no definite way to determine exactly what nectar sources the bees utilized.

Runny vs. Set Honey: Runny honey refers to the common, clear liquid honey sold in jars. Set honey is another term for crystallized honey.

Comb Honey: The block of hexagon cells made of beeswax that encapsulate the honey is called honeycomb. (Some honeycombs in the hive serve to incubate the brood, but those will not be what you find for sale at markets.) Sections of the honeycomb are sold in blocks. They are very fragile and therefore enclosed in plastic boxes to keep them intact. Pieces of filled honeycomb in random shapes might be included in a jar of liquid honey, and they are called “cut comb.” The beautiful golden pieces are just as delicious to eat as honey, and the chewy wax is completely edible.

Crystallized Honey: Honey is a super-saturated solution of sugars (glucose and fructose) and water. When the sugar molecules fall out of the solution, they create firm crystals. This reaction spreads progressively, and the entire jar will eventually crystallize. This is more prone to happen with a reduction in temperature or the presence of pollen particles in the honey. There is nothing wrong or unsafe about crystallized honey, except the texture can be gritty. In fact, it proves it is pure and unadulterated. Many people find crystallized honey easy to spread and the flavor is unaffected. Crystallized honey can be liquefied with gentle heating.

Creamed or Whipped Honey: Made from crystallized honey, this variety is created when processors control the crystallization process so the resulting mixture is spreadable and somewhat smooth. Sometimes called whipped honey, the product is dense and does not have air incorporated into it as the name “whipped” implies.

Fermented Honey: This specialty product can occur naturally or can be intentionally created. Fermentation occurs when the moisture content, yeast, and enzyme content are high and coupled with heat. It is safe to eat, and many people enjoy the sharp flavor and aroma. Fermented honey starts with raw, unpasteurized honey, as any heat processing will prohibit yeast growth. Fermented honey is not necessarily alcoholic but might have a bit of that flavor.

Mead: This alcoholic beverage is made by fermenting honey into a beverage that is sometimes called “honey wine.” The amount of alcohol can range widely from a small percentage to more than 20%, and the flavor will vary depending on the type of honey and any spices, fruits, or herbs included in the fermentation process. Ancient Greeks called it the “nectar of the gods,” and mead might be the oldest boozy beverage.

Cooking with Honey: Tips and Substitutions

Honey is an amazing ingredient to eat raw, cook with, or bake into recipes. Its primary sweetness balances sour flavors and masks bitterness, while its viscous texture thickens or adds smoothness to recipes.

- Store honey at room temperature, ideally between 64° and 75°. Honey stored at cooler temperatures, such as in the refrigerator, may crystallize.
- To liquefy crystallized or solid honey, place the jar in hot water or stir the honey into a hot liquid like tea or coffee. It is not recommended to heat honey in a microwave.
- If unopened in a sealed container, honey will last indefinitely, regardless if it is raw or pasteurized. Over time, honey may darken. Once a jar is opened, keep it tightly sealed at room temperature.
- The darker the honey, the stronger the taste. Pale honey stored in the sunlight may darken and subtly change flavor.
- Because honey is so dense, 1 cup of honey weighs 12 ounces, not 8 like a cup of water. A (16-ounce) jar of honey measures 1⅓ cups.
- For easy measuring, lightly grease the inside of a measuring cup with oil, cooking spray, or butter. The honey won't stick to the sides and will slide right out.
- Honey has a sweeter taste than table sugar, so less is needed.
- Honey is hygroscopic, meaning it attracts or retains moisture. Using honey as a sweetener in cakes and cookies helps keep them soft and tender.
- To substitute honey for granulated sugar, use ¾ cup for every 1 cup of sugar. For amounts less than 1 cup of sugar, substitute equal amounts of honey.

- Aside from sweetening, sugar crystals will help whip tiny air bubbles into batter; these will expand when heated, helping a cake or cookie to rise. In these recipes, substitute half or a portion of honey, using a blend of both.
- Because honey is made up of about 20% water, you may need to reduce another liquid in a baked recipe, such as milk or juice, by $\frac{1}{4}$ cup for every $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup honey used. For cookie dough or other batter without added liquids, increase flour by 1 tablespoon to reach an ideal texture.
- Honey is acidic and can affect a baked recipe. If the recipe doesn't already contain baking soda, add about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of baking soda per 1 cup honey.







beverages and sauces



Honey Spiced Tea

.....

Warm and comforting, this spiced syrup sweetens any strong tea. Earl Grey has a citrusy, bergamot flavoring that is enhanced by the honey, but you can use a plain orange pekoe tea with equally yummy results.

.....

makes 1½ cups syrup

INGREDIENTS

1 cup water
½ cup honey
5 cinnamon sticks, broken
into pieces
6 cardamom pods, crushed
1 (¼-inch) slice fresh ginger
1 tablespoon coriander seeds,
crushed
1 teaspoon whole allspice,
crushed
½ teaspoon whole
black peppercorns
1 (1-inch-wide) orange or
lemon rind
Earl Grey or orange pekoe
tea bags

Combine 1 cup water, honey, cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, coriander, allspice, peppercorns, and citrus rind in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer on low heat for 15 minutes. Let stand 1 hour or longer for a stronger flavor. Strain and transfer to a canning jar or other container. Store in refrigerator.

Prepare tea bags individually or together in a pitcher, making the tea extra strong. Remove tea bags and stir in desired amount of spiced syrup. Serve warm or chilled over ice cubes.



Whiskey-Amaretto Sour

.....

Skip prepared sour mixes filled with unnatural ingredients; instead, stir together a simple Honey Syrup with fresh lemon juice. You can keep the Honey Syrup in the fridge for a week, but I prefer adding the lemon juice just before serving for the freshest, most vibrant flavor.

.....

makes 1 cocktail

INGREDIENTS

1½ ounces (3 tablespoons)
amaretto liqueur
1 ounce (2 tablespoons) whiskey
or bourbon
1 ounce (2 tablespoons)
Honey Syrup (recipe at right)
1 ounce (2 tablespoons) fresh
lemon juice

GARNISHES

Maraschino cherry, lemon slice
or peel

Combine amaretto, whiskey, Honey Syrup, and lemon juice in an ice-filled cocktail shaker. Shake vigorously and strain into an ice-filled glass. Garnish, if desired.

Honey Syrup: Combine **½ cup honey** and **¼ cup hot water**, stirring until well blended. Cover and chill until ready to serve.



Honey-Lime Margarita

.....

Using Honey Syrup instead of granulated sugar gives this zesty cocktail a lovely golden color and adds an earthier type of sweetness. Fresh lime juice is the key to an amazing margarita, and finding the best Persian limes makes juicing very easy. I look for more rounded limes with soft, shiny skins as opposed to hard, football-shaped limes. Give each one a squeeze before buying. If they yield easily, then they have more juice than the harder ones. Persian limes are the common ones found in markets. Key limes are smaller and seasonally available.

.....

makes 2 cocktails

INGREDIENTS

⅓ cup fresh lime juice
4 ounces (½ cup) tequila
2 ounces (¼ cup) Honey Syrup
(page 27)
1 ounce (2 tablespoons)
orange liqueur

GARNISH

Lime zest or slices

Combine juice, tequila, Honey Syrup, and liqueur in an ice-filled cocktail shaker. Shake vigorously and strain into 2 ice-filled rocks glasses. Garnish, if desired.



Honey Mint Syrup

Use a melon baller to create small fruit spheres, and drizzle them with this chilled syrup. Try the usual cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon, as well as other fruit like pineapple, papaya, and kiwi. You can also drizzle the syrup over pound cake or use it to sweeten iced tea or lemonade.

makes $\frac{3}{4}$ cup

INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey

1 cup lightly packed fresh
mint leaves, torn

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup water

Combine honey, mint, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in a saucepan over medium heat. Simmer, stirring frequently, for 5 minutes, pressing and crushing mint with a spoon to release its flavor.

Remove from heat; cool completely. Strain mint leaves and discard. If desired, add chopped fresh mint or tiny mint leaves to the syrup. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.



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About the Author



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PUBLICATIONS
Adventure
an imprint of AdventureKEEN

ISBN 978-1-64755-184-1 \$16.95 U.S.



COOKING / SPECIFIC INGREDIENTS