

Honey and Wax Notes

Based on a talk by Dave Shannon (Honey Show Judge) 08/03/2017

Honey

It is a criminal offence to sell "blossom" honey with a water content >20%. However, water content of <22% is permitted for heather honey.

The simple way to measure water content is with a hand held spectrometer. This can be undertaken at any time, and with the aid of a pipette the moisture content of honey still on the comb can be checked before it is removed for extraction.

After the initial sieving at extraction time, honey that is to be shown should be filtered through a 200 micron muslin bag to get it perfectly clear. Filtering at 200 microns is best achieved when the honey temperature is approx 40⁰ C.

However, filtering at 200 microns does remove some of the pollen, the most significant loss being the pollen of squashes and gourds.

Honey for showing is divided into 3 classes; light medium and dark. The class in which a particular jar is to be entered is determined by comparing it with grading glasses.

Light – The same or lighter than the light glass.

Medium – Darker than the light glass but lighter than the dark glass.

Darker – The same or darker than the dark glass.

400 micron filtering is fine for normal consumption and this can be done easily at 30⁰C.

Filter bags or cloths should be dampened before filtering commences.

Settling tanks or buckets should always be filled to the top to minimise the air gap and they should be stored in a cool place prior to bottling.

To minimise the creation of air bubbles at bottling time the honey should be warmed to 30⁰ to 36⁰ C. However, bubbles are permitted in heather honey that is to be shown.

The clarity of bottled honey is best checked with the aid of an LED torch.

Oilseed Rape and White Clover produce the best soft set honey, but beware, OSR honey will set solid in the settling tank within 2 to 3 weeks.

Soft set honey can be produced by the seeding method using a ratio of 1 part honey of the required texture (the seed) to 9 parts liquid honey.

For simplicity, the honey used for seeding can be obtained from a previous batch, another beekeeper or even the supermarket! Or, if your soft set honey is to be made wholly from your own crystallised honey, this can be achieved by pounding the seed portion of crystallised honey with a mortar and pestle until it is at the required consistency (crystal size).

The seeding process (mixing) is best undertaken at 30⁰C using a hand held creamer, taking care not to raise it above the surface of the honey because this creates air bubbles. When thoroughly mixed, it can be bottled and left to set at approx 15⁰C.

Wax

For showing purposes, the lighter the colour, the better. Cappings provide the best source of “clean” light wax.

Initial smelting can be done in a solar heated box or by placing in boiling water. The wax can then be removed from the surface of the water / grunge, thereby achieving the first level of purification.

The wax will still contain many impurities at this stage, but it can be further cleansed by passing the liquid wax through a stainless steel sieve or the nylon mesh of a stocking or a pair of tights.

It is only after this filtering that the wax can then be poured into show moulds or candles etc.

Any stainless steel sieves, ladles, or glass containers should always be heated in the oven to at least the same temperature as the molten wax before they are used. This prevents the wax setting immediately it touches these objects.

When making candles, always use the correct thickness of wick for the size of the candle and always impregnate the wick with the wax before pouring the candle.