

Making the Best of Your Honey

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. They are called Versotiles and I bought them at Spring Conference several years ago. However, if you Google them, I'm sure you can still buy them on the internet. 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 bees 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 that I put the super on to in the back of my Land Rover 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 it. 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 it.

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 either 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.

Ensure that honey has been 'ripened' by the bees. Most, if not all, of the frame of wax should be capped. Bees bring in nectar, evaporate off 82% of the water which then leaves the sugars – honey. They then cap it to store as their winter feed. Ripened honey should have approximately 18% water content. If it has more – say 22% - it risks fermenting when the honey will bubble up and run down the outside of the jar. If you take the honey off too soon, before the bees have finished processing it, the water content will be too high. You can measure the water content of honey with a refractometer.

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 1.2 mm for mandatory information. As letters of the alphabet are inevitably of different sizes, the 1.2 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 local 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.

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 are identical. Certainly the colour should be identical and 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. 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 from the base of the jar. The judge will weigh each jar so if it is not up to weight it will be discarded.