



Note 3.06
(Previously Note #16A)

PREPARING LIQUID HONEY FOR COMPETITION & SALE

The art of beekeeping provides opportunities for the hobbyist to do more than just raise bees. One such opportunity is that of producing award-winning honey that can be entered in local and state fair honey competitions. Tasty honey is important, but even more so is the overall presentation of your product. There are several qualities that determine a winning entry. While some of these qualities are beyond the control of the beekeeper, steps can be taken to reduce or eliminate many of the factors that downgrade honey entries. Extracted honey is the most popular type of honey submitted in contests, and it will be the only type discussed here.

Beekeeping Note #16, Judging Liquid (Extracted) Honey, discusses the characteristics used in judging honey. This note gives recommendations for submitting high quality honey for competition or for sale. Figure 1 is a sample honey judging form.

JUDGE=S SCORE CARD N.C. STATE FAIR		
Event: EXTRACTED HONEY Class: _____ Entry No. _____		
Point Scoring	Item	
10		Density (Moisture content over 18.6%--DISQUALIFIED)
10		Absence of granulation or crystallization
30		Cleanliness: absence of lint, dirt, wax & foam
15		Flavor: absence of overheating & fermentation
15		Color & brightness
15		Container appearance: cleanliness & uniformity
5		Uniformity of entries in class
		Remarks:

Fig. 1 -- Judging criteria for liquid (extracted) honey

1. Density

One important factor is density which is related to the moisture content of the honey. The moisture content is not to exceed 18.6%. The main reason moisture content is so important is that excessive moisture will allow yeasts to grow, thereby causing fermentation. Using honey frames that are at least 75% capped will usually assure that the honey has a low enough moisture content. *Always* test your honey for the proper viscosity before submitting an entry. This can be done by a) learning for yourself what the proper viscosity feels and looks like; b) contacting a state land grant university apiculture program and getting recommendations from them; or c) asking the officials of the honey judging competition to measure the density for you.

2. Absence of granulation or crystallization

Another factor involved in the judging of honey is the absence of granulation. While granulation is a natural process, measures can be taken to keep this factor under control. One way to reduce the risk of granulation is to submit a type of honey that has a low glucose content, as this type honey tends to granulate less. Both tulip poplar and sourwood honey are good choices of honey that are low in glucose and high in fructose. (Note: Honey with high fructose levels taste sweeter than high glucose honey.) It is also helpful to heat the honey to remove any crystals or granules that may already be present. This can be done by placing the honey in a water bath having a temperature range of 95-120°F. Finally, any crystals or granules that are still present can be removed by filtering, which is discussed under Item #3, Cleanliness.

3. Cleanliness

The honey is also judged on cleanliness. Submissions will be inspected for any dirt, wax, lint, or foam. Filling the jar with warm honey will cause any wax to float to the top of the jar where it can be skimmed off. In order to prevent foam, pour the honey into the jar slowly. It is also helpful to keep the distance between the honey and the jar in which you are pouring it to a minimum, perhaps even hitting the side of the jar with the honey as you pour. Any further dirt, wax, or lint should be filtered out before submission using an appropriate lint-free filter. Pantyhose is a good choice of a filter that does not produce lint, while cheese-cloth is a poor choice, as it does produce lint.

4. Flavor

The importance of flavor in judging is usually limited to overheating, fermentation, and obviously, unpleasant flavors. Overheating will cause a burnt sugar flavor, while fermentation can cause the honey to taste sour. Certain floral sources such as tobacco can produce unpleasant, even disagreeable-tasting honey. *Always* taste the honey you plan to submit. This is an obvious point but one often overlooked.

5. Color and Brightness

Judges also look at both the color and brightness of honey submissions. While these factors are unrelated to the flavor of the honey, they contribute to the aesthetic value of the honey, which is important to the consumer. Cleaning and filtering the honey as well as slightly heating it prior to competition can improve the color and brightness. This can be done by pouring honey that has been heated through a filter to remove impurities. (Note: Never heat the honey to temperatures over 140°F for more than 30 minutes.)

6. Container Appearance

Judges also look at the cleanliness of the container in which your honey is submitted. Always make sure your containers are free of smudges and imperfections. Imperfections in the glass can appear to be debris in the honey itself. Wiping with a moist, lint-free towel before submission will remove any travel stains from your honey jars. Judges also look under the lid, so be sure to wipe out this area as well. It only takes a small effort to see that your containers are appropriately clean, so don't miss points on this one! Also, remember to fill the jars to the appropriate level. This is between the grooves at the mouth of the jar. Filling over this level will make it easier to spill the honey when the jar is opened, and underfilling may make a

consumer feel cheated. It is also a good idea to use glass containers for competitions, even though they are more expensive and heavier than plastic ones. Glass jars don't scratch as easily as plastic ones. Save the less expensive plastic containers for selling your honey.

7. Uniformity of Entries in Class

A final factor judges grade when choosing a winner is the uniformity among your submissions. You are usually required to submit three jars of honey to represent your entry. Make sure they all look as much alike as possible, adhering to the proper guidelines. Judges often randomly select from the three jars, so make sure all three are of the highest quality possible.

Entering honey in competitions allows the beekeeper to take pride in his/her product. It gives the beekeeper the opportunity to be rewarded for the hard work and dedication this hobby requires. It also gives one the chance to learn from mistakes and improve the product in the future. The recommendations for preparing award-winning entries will also help you in preparing attractive eye-appealing honey for sale. Don't miss out on the opportunity to win a ribbon or even a cash award -- enter your honey at the next local or state fair. Good luck!!

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