

HOW TO MANAGE
THE HONEY BEE
IN
NEW ZEALAND

COMPILED BY AN OLD BEE-KEEPER

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THE HONEY BEE IN NEW ZEALAND (1868) - EXCERPT

DOMESTIC USE OF HONEY & WAX

H.J. Hawkins and David Hay

HONEY AND WAX FOR DOMESTIC PURPOSES.

Dr. Cumming says that:—It has been urged as a commercial question that honey is not now of the same importance as it was before the sugar-cane was discovered, and that gas has superseded wax candles. I am satisfied from many considerations, that if people would eat honey at breakfast instead of rancid London butter and nasty greasy bacon, not only would their health be better, but their temper would be sweeter. I find invariably that people who like honey are persons of genial and affectionate temper. If Mr. Cobden and Mr. Roebuck had only taken honey at breakfast, or a very choice fragment of virgin honey at dessert, they would never have given utterance to those vinegar and acetic-acid speeches which did them no credit. I wish somebody would send Mr. Spurgeon a sup[p]er of good honey. Three months' diet on this celestial food would induce him to give up those shockingly bitter and unchristian tirades he has been lately making against the clergy of the Church of England. The producers of honey never draw their stings unless in defence of their homesteads, and the eaters and admirers of honey rarely indulge in acrimonious language. I believe a great deal of bad feeling is not moral or mental, but physical, in its origin. If you have in a congregation, or in a school, or in a convocation, some one who sets everybody by the ears, treat him to a little honey at breakfast for six months, and the "thorn will blossom as the rose."

Therefore, as you take the honey combs out of the hive, separate those which are quite full from such as are only partly so; those which are pure white combs from such as are dark in colour, or have some of the cells filled with bee bread. This separation may easily be made by having several dishes or milk pans by you, in which to lay the different sorts of comb as they come to hand. By making this division at once, will save a good deal of honey; for if all the combs are heaped together in one vessel, the dark combs, which are the hardest, will crush and otherwise injure the pure white combs; in them the wax is very thin and fragile, hardly able to bear the weight of the honey which they contain, and sinking immediately under any external pressure. Often you will find two sorts of honey comb, the pure and the impure, in the same cake. Separate them at once with a sharp knife.

If you take a top box or a glass entirely full of pure honey, you need not be in any hurry to cut it out; it will keep better where it is, if only you place it in security, where no bee on a foraging excursion can possibly find it out.

If you have more pure honey comb than you can sell or use yourself, run it out in this way: give two cuts to each comb with a sharp knife, so as to slice off the covers of every cell. This is in fact uncorking all the bottles in which the bees have stored their honey. Then set the sliced combs in a sieve or colander to drain, with a vessel below to catch the honey as it runs. If you have large earthenware pots to store your honey in, it is best to let it drain from the seive or colander into this at once: you will thus avoid having to pour it from vessel to vessel.

When all the honey has run from the white combs—and almost every drop will drain from them if you cut them sufficiently—place the comb in the middle of the apiary on some fine day, and the bees will take care that none of it is lost. They will extract every atom of honey from the wax.

You'll be surprised to find the great difference in the honey which your bees make at different times of the year. The best, perhaps, that ever

I tasted, was made in the neighbourhood of a number of almond trees while they were in full flower. It is one of the few cultivated plants which materially affect the quality of the honey, and may be profitably grown to a great extent in this country. The honey, also, from clover paddocks, is very plentiful, and beautifully white. Many native trees, too, are excellent honey producers; whilst some few others impart to the honey a peculiar, and to some people a disagreeable, twang. But there is one peculiarity in a great deal of the New Zealand honey, which I must mention, namely, its great readiness to crystalize. In some districts whole boxes will be found with the honey crystalized in the cells in one solid mass, as difficult to cut through as a very solid cheese. The white combs filled with this species of honey are exquisitely white, and the honey of such good quality that it may be eaten quite as a confection. The comb, when cut through, shews hardly any appearance of wax; it seems one solid mass of sugar; and yet the shape of the cells is clearly discernible.

You can be in no doubt what to do with this sort of honey comb. It will keep any length of time, if the combs are wrapped up in white paper, and carefully packed away, or put a number of them together in a box. It is one of the best specimens of New Zealand produce with which to surprise and please our friends at home. But it affects what I am now telling you about running your honey in this way. It is difficult, nay, impossible, to get it from the impure combs by any of the ordinary methods; it will not run—pressure is equally useless.

And now for the second article of bee produce—the wax. It is by far the most valuable of the two: for this reason—because there will be an unlimited demand for it. I have spoken of honey and wax, the produce of bees in their first and simple forms. The bleached wax of commerce is easily prepared by increasing the surface of the wax, and then exposing it to the action of sun and air. A simple way of bleaching wax in small quantities is to run it into cakes in the usual way, and then bleach as before;

only be careful not to overheat your wax, or you will spoil its colour, and deprive it of many of its useful qualities.

The uses of wax for domestic purposes, and in the arts, are various and extensive. The greater portion of that imported into England is used perhaps in candles. But I have already said that I hope the day may come when wax candles of our own make will take the place of dips. But there are many smaller articles which a careful housekeeper will like to have at hand, to say nothing of the pleasure of sewing with a well waxed thread. Lip salve and cerate are no bad things to have in the house—the latter is made by melting an ounce of wax, and heating an ounce of sweet oil, not boiling either. Pour them together at the same temperature, and keep stirring steadily until they leave the fluid for the buttery state. If you leave off stirring just at the setting point, the wax and oil will separate, and you will have to melt again. But if you stir steadily all the time, you will have a substance soft as butter and smooth as oil—of such excellent healing powers, that I have sometimes wished to have a sore place to test its virtues. The cerate may be made harder or softer by altering the proportion of oil to the wax.

The softer cerate is best for dressing a blister; nothing better,—the harder, for spreading on linen, to apply to any sore made by long confinement in bed. An excellent ointment for a burn is made by dissolving a lump of camphor in the oil before you add it to the wax. Remember what I said about stirring.

Many other things may be made of wax—lip salve, &c.; but I shall not stop now to give receipts for them, as almost any old woman knows how to make them.

Now, to speak of the uses of honey: It will save you many a sugar bill if you have plenty of it; and many a bill for other things too. Excellent wine may be made from it, which, when it has been kept for some few years,

can hardly be told from sherry. First-rate beer may be made from honey. Without reckoning the worth of the honey, it is found to stand the maker at a penny a gallon. And what hard working man can have any excuse for sopping in a pothouse, when he can have a drink so strengthening and wholesome as this, if taken in moderation; with his wife, too, to share it after the labour of the day is over?

Mead or Hydromel

This is of two sorts; the weaker, and the stronger mead, or metheglin. If your mead be not strong enough by the refuse of your combs, then put so much of your coarse honey into it as will make it strong enough to bear an egg the breadth of a twopence above the top of the liquor, which is sufficient for ordinary mead; and afterwards, till night, ever and anon, stir it about the vat. If you would make a greater quantity, then you must add a greater measure of water and honey; namely, six gallons of water to one of honey. Some will boil this proportion of six to one, to four; but I think to five is very sufficient. The spices to this proportion are cinnamon, ginger, pepper, grains of paradise, cloves, of each two drams. The next morning, put to the liquor some of the scum of the honey; stir them together, and stoop the vat a little backwards: when it hath settled an hour or two, draw it off to be boiled: and when you see the sediment appear, stop, and let the rest run into some vessel by itself, which, when settled, strain into the boiler, and the dregs of all cast into your garden for the use of your bees.

When your liquor is set over a gentle fire, and a thick scum is gathered all over, and the bubbles by the sides begin to break the scum, having damped your fire to cease the boiling, skim it clean, and then presently blow up your fire; and when you see the second scum ready, having again damped the fire, take off the scum as before: and then, having again stirred the fire, let it boil handsomely for the space of an hour, or thereabouts; but be sure you always keep scumming it as there is occasion.

After all this is done, put in your spices according to the former receipt, and let it boil a quarter of an hour more. The boiling is to cleanse the mead, which once done, any farther boiling does but rather diminish than increase the goodness and strength of the mead.

As soon as it hath done boiling, take it from the fire and set it to cool; the next day, when it is settled, strain it through a hair sieve or linen bag into the vat or tub, reserving still the dregs for the bees, and let it stand covered three or four days till it work, and let it work two days; and turn it into a barrel scalded with bay leaves, making the spice bag fast at the top. If you make no great

quantity of mead, you may turn it the next day, and let it work in the barrel; your ordinary mead which turns sour will make excellent vinegar.

Metheglin is the more generous and stronger sort of hydromel, for it beareth an egg to the breadth of a sixpence, and is usually made of finer honey with a less proportion of water, namely, four to one. To every barrel of sixteen gallons of skimmed liquor, add thyme one ounce; eglantine, sweet marjoram, rosemary, of each half an ounce; ginger, two ounces; cinnamon, one ounce; cloves and pepper, of each half an ounce; all gross beaten, the one half boiled loose in the liquor, and the other half put into a bag before, in mead; so that after this manner being made, as ordinary mead will not keep above half a year, this, the longer it is kept, the stronger it is, and hath the more delicate flavour and taste.

Royal Mead

In six gallons of water put six quarts of honey, stirring it till the honey is thoroughly mixed; then set it over the fire, and when ready to boil, scum it very well; add one quarter of an ounce of mace, as much ginger, half an ounce of nutmeg, some sweet marjoram, thyme, and sweet briar, together a handful; boil it in the liquid; let it stand till cold; set it working with a little yeast in a barrel, putting the bung lightly on, and filling it up from time to time with some of the same liquid. When it has done working, bung it up tight, and leave it in the cask several months before bottling it off. When it has been bottled some time it will effervesce like the best English gooseberry wine, and will keep, I doubt not, for years.

N.B. — One quart is equal to 3½ lbs. of strained honey.

Sack Mead

Put one gallon of water to four pounds of honey; boil it three quarters of an hour, and scum it well. For every gallon of the liquor add an ounce of hops; boil it half an hour, and let it stand till next day. Put it into a cask, and to every thirteen gallons of liquor add a quart of brandy. Put the bung on lightly till the fermentation is over, then stop it very close. If you make a large cask, keep it a year before you bottle it.

Bottled Beer, like Scotch Twopenny

To fourteen gallons of water add a pound of hops previously steeped in a little water; boil it half an hour; strain it and let it run upon the honey, about a pound and three quarters to each gallon of liquor, more or less. When cool, put it in a barrel and ferment as before. This is an excellent summer drink; as is the following:-

Ginger Wine

To eight quarts of water put eight ounces of ginger, twenty-four pounds of honey, and eight lemons. Work and bottle as before.

In the two last receipts the strength of the wort may be increased or diminished by varying the proportion of honey.

Honey Vinegar

Put a pound of honey to a quart of water, mix well, and then expose in the greatest heat of the sun, without wholly closing the bung hole, which must be covered with coarse linen to keep out insects. In about six weeks it will be changed to vinegar of an excellent quality. A spoonful or two of this vinegar mixed with cold water is a very agreeable summer drink. It may be either used plain or made to effervesce by a little soda.

A cunning housewife, doubtless, would improve on many of these receipts; her main difficulty in supplying a family with these beverages will be in straining the honey, which runs very slowly when of a thick quality. This I think may be obviated by boiling clean honey combs in a due proportion of water, and then letting the liquor stand till cold, when the wax will have formed on the top, and may be taken off. Then proceed as above.

A less agreeable, though not less useful, application of honey, is in the form of a *cough mixture*.

Fill a quart bottle three parts full of clarified honey, mix well with this a teaspoonful of Ipecacuanha, then fill up with sharp vinegar: a spoonful or two of this, whenever the cough is troublesome, will have a very good effect.

