

Shades of Sweet



GOLD

Varietal honeys from a particular flower or region offer an exquisite spectrum of tastes

By Elizabeth Pollock

As with fine wines and specialty coffees, there's a world of flavors to be discovered in varietal honeys. Honeys from particular flowers or regions offer a broad, golden spectrum of strikingly varied tastes, from a dark, intense buckwheat honey ("the espresso of the honey world") to a delicate "water-white" honey gathered solely from Acacia blossoms.

Retailers are noting a growing interest in varietal honeys. "Honey is a really good category. In my opinion it's very hot, especially varietal honeys," says Geri Ackert, buyer at **Balducci's** in New York City. "People are understanding that lavender isn't just a name for a honey, but that it's from the flower. Honey goes



Midas Rainbow. The color of a honey gives a clue to its flavor. Generally, lighter colored honeys are milder and more delicate, while darker honeys are stronger and more intense.

well with tea, and it has a real presence in cooking too. We recently did a recipe with a chestnut honey in our newsletter. We sample honeys on pieces of apple or pear."

Honey's golden gleam

can make for a stunning display. **Jungle Jim's** in Fairfield, Ohio, has devoted a 30-foot-long wooden table to honeys, cross-merchandised with cookbooks on honey and a videotape that shows how honey is made. "On top of the table we have honeys set on glass shelves with a light shining through, which really makes them shine," says Mike Adkins, assistant store manager. "Interest in honey is growing," he adds. "We're trying to get as many varieties as we can. I've started adding signs to the display to show what part of the world or country the honeys are from."

To raise customer interest and excitement about varietal honeys, let people taste the differences for themselves. Offering comparative tastings has helped

Honey Acres in Ashippun, Wis., to sell more honey. In fact, these fourth-generation beekeepers and honey packers have created an entire honey museum, which includes a tasting area to sample and compare honeys. "We use a good 30,000 tasting spoons every year," says Walter Diehnelt, master beekeeper and president.

Many of the more intriguing specialty honeys are rare and hard to find. But a great source of information is a directory of America's honey suppliers at www.nhb.org, a web site of the National Honey Board (NHB) that lists hundreds of suppliers, from small local beekeepers to importers of international honeys. The NHB also can provide retailers with a wealth of free promotional materials, like recipe brochures and posters: call (303) 776-2337.

Appropriately enough, September, with its golden days of lingering summer, is national honey month.



Mobile Homes. To obtain varietal honeys, beekeepers move the hives to the area where the desired flowers are in full blossom.

Photo courtesy of the National Honey Board



ESTABLISHED • WISCONSIN 1938[®]
LOST ACRES
 FRUIT BUTTERS

An American Folk Favorite.

We simmer ripe succulent fruits into a smooth, rich, buttery spread with a robust texture and flavor. Perfect as a spread for fresh-baked bread, muffins, biscuits and waffles. Or use as a filling for tarts and pies or as a refreshing dip for cookies and fruit.

Try all of our fantastic flavors including our "natural" fruit butters which are sweetened with 100% fruit juice.

Call us for more information on all of our country-fresh flavors!

Lost Acres is a JMS Specialty Foods Brand, P.O. Box 345 Ripon, WI 54971
 Call 920-748-2858, 1-800-535-5437 or Fax 920-748-3168



The Gilway Co. has a new line of New Zealand honeys, which are exceptionally pure, since they come from an environment with almost no heavy industry and with no use

of pesticides or herbicides. They range from a subtle, almost white Rata honey, considered one of New Zealand's best, to a stronger Manuka, reputed to be useful for treating fevers, colds and upset stomachs. Call (201) 843-8152.

A new label on Palmetto honey from **Tropical Blossom Honey Co.** gives a recipe for "Healthful Honey Tea" (made with hot water, honey and apple cider vinegar) and tells the story of how one hundred years ago, honey producers in central Florida shipped Palmetto honey and berries to the capitals of Europe for their health-giving qualities. Tupelo honey has been in demand ever since the movie "Ulee's Gold" was released last year. Call (904) 428-9027.



Bee's Knees Honey Factory has recently added a Sage honey, gathered in early May and June from the purple flowers of West Coast sage. It's a very light honey with a mellow, distinct flavor that the company describes as "a bouquet reminiscent of springtime in the desert." Call (503) 225-0755.

HONEY FOR YOUR HEALTH

Studies are at work to back up centuries of folklore about the healing properties of honey.

As a pure sweetener that comes directly from nature, honey has always been seen as naturally healthy. It also has a lesser-known reputation for homeopathic powers. In the dark and often wise corners of folklore, stories abound of honey being used to heal burns, relieve stomach problems, prevent allergies and even cure acne.



It seems these tales may soon get some scientific backing. The National Honey Board (NHB) is currently sponsoring intense scientific

The book Seven Health Secrets from the Hive is by third-generation beekeeper Charles H. Robson of Silver Meadow Honey. Available for \$12. Call (520) 685-2439.

study to determine exactly what medicinal values honey really has. The official results won't be released until the first half of 1999 because the materials are currently being scrutinized by a scientific review panel. "We don't want any doubts," says Gretchen Lichtenwalner, NHB's communications director.

So far, some very interesting findings have come to light. "Honey has some pretty powerful medicinal properties," says Lichtenwalner. "We're now confident in its antioxidant values and antibacterial properties, which translate into things like burn and wound treatment. Within a year, we're hoping to come out with very scientific studies about honey and diabetes. We think diabetics will be able to eat honey, which is contrary to current beliefs. We're also doing research on honey as a treatment for skin ulcers, pressure sores, yeast infections and pollen allergies. It also may improve calcium absorption." The NHB's research relates to honey in general, but some varieties are more effective than others. The general rule is that the darker the honey, the more effective it is.

"It's fascinating that some of these old remedies are coming back again as part of the alternative health movement," says Douglas McGinnis, a member of NHB's executive committee and vice president of Tropical Blossom Honey Co. "As we get more data from these studies, it just backs up what we already knew all along: Honey has a lot of health-giving properties."



“Stimulating” Herbal Honey from **Fredericksburg Herb Farm** is a mesquite honey that contains essential oils of peppermint, lemon and rosemary, for a refreshing taste with a delicious herbal tang. The honey is reported to be energizing and helpful for relieving fatigue and aches. It’s also used in Fredericksburg Herb Farm’s adjoining health spa as a refreshing, skin-softening facial mask (leave on for 10 minutes). *Call (800) 259-HERB.*

Since macadamia and lehua trees grow almost exclusively in Hawaii, which only has a few beekeepers, these rare Macadamia- and Lehua-Blossom honeys from **Western Commerce** are available in limited supplies. Rich, amber macadamia honey has a distinctive, aromatic flavor. Lehua is a very sweet, light-amber honey from heady, sweet-smelling lehua blossoms. *Call (626) 333-5225.*



TRADING PLACES

In “The Sweets of Milan,” a PBS episode of “Origins with Burt Wolf,” Wolf discusses how honey and sugar have swapped places as a sweetening staple. Interesting, sugar was originally thought to have medicinal properties, too. For information on the series, call your local PBS station.

“For centuries, honey lived its sweet life without competition. Then in the 11th century, sugar arrived from the East. But for over 400 years, [sugar] was rare; it was expensive; it was used only as a spice or a medicine, and only by the very rich. When sugar production got started in the Caribbean, the sugar business took off. Suddenly there was a clear increase in the use of sugar in place of honey. As sugar became more and more available, and at a lower and lower price, the general public began to use it as much as possible. Sugar made them feel they were eating like a king, and sugar became an important item of international trade, which was never the case with honey. Sugar was big business, and it was a sweet deal for the governments that taxed it. Sugar became the first luxury to end up as a mainstay in the diet of an entire continent.”



The three-pack sampler from **Moon Shine Trading Co.** has new packaging with a clear lid so you can see through to the 2½-ounce jars of honey inside and their beautiful watercolor labels. Eucalyptus is a mineral-rich honey with a mild flavor; Black Button Sage, from the Southern California Coastal Mountains, is an exceptional delicate, “water-white” honey; and California Star Thistle is a yellow honey with a sweet, candy-like flavor from an increasingly rare Northern California wildflower. *Call (530) 753-0601.*

Honeys from **Market Provence** are so new they don’t have English labels yet. In the regions of France where they’re from, each distinctive variety is believed to have different healing purposes: the dark, strong chestnut for anemia; the aromatic fir for bronchitis and asthma; the golden rosemary to fight stress and fatigue; the aromatic lavender for migraines and sleep disorders; and the delicate, soft acacia to sweeten bottles of newborns. *Call (888) 653-8502.*

