

## Preparation Of Comb Honey For Show

There are several publications available on the production of comb honey, so this short article is concerned purely with the showing and judging of both cut comb and section honey.

When preparing any exhibiting, especially honey, read the Schedule and the Rules carefully, as not all shows have the same criteria, e.g., weight requirements for cut comb and containers for sections.

The general requirements for both sections and cut comb are the same. ALL comb honey must be produced on new, thin, unwired foundation and when finished must be fully capped on both sides, free from cells containing pollen and with no signs of braula or wax moth damage.

All comb honey should be produced during a good nectar flow to ensure quick and even drawing, filling and capping of the comb, which should be removed from the hive as soon as it is ready. This will minimize the risk of 'travel staining' and the addition any different colours of honey that could mar an otherwise excellent exhibit.

On removal from the hive, comb honey should be sealed in an air tight container and placed in the freezer for at least 24 hours. This will prevent any unseen braula or wax moth eggs from hatching and later spoiling the exhibit. Storing in the freezer will also prevent granulation taking place (as long as there is no granulation already in the comb). Allow all comb to defrost thoroughly before removing from the air-tight container.

Oil seed rape and similar types of honey are not suitable for comb honey production due to their property of rapid granulation; all comb honey for show should be free of granulation and of the same type of honey throughout.

When judging takes place, the judge will thoroughly inspect both sides of the comb and any sign of braula or wax moth damage will instantly disqualify the exhibit. Clean white cappings with well-defined cell markings and no traces of 'travel staining' will take precedence over an exhibit with 'greasy' looking capping. A torch will then be shone through the comb to show up the presence of any pollen or granulation or extraneous matter, any of which will result in severe penalization, if not disqualification. Good aroma and flavour are of equal or even greater importance than for honey in the jar.

### **Cut Comb**

Cut comb should normally be exhibited in opaque white containers with transparent lids. All the above criteria apply, with the addition of the following; the comb should be evenly drawn on each side of the mid-rib, which should be seen to be of thin wax.

The comb should be cut to exactly fit the container, use a template and a sharp knife, not a commercial comb cutter, and should be well drained on a rack (a cake cooling rack is suitable) before insertion. There should be no loose honey in the container when judging takes place. Never be tempted to 'make up the weight' with liquid honey, or indeed with another, thin piece of comb underneath, the latter would result

in instant disqualification. The judge will remove the comb from the container to inspect the capping on both sides and if this is not possible due to loose honey in the container the exhibit will be severely penalized.

When two or more pieces of cut comb are required for a class the rule of uniformity applies and they should match in every respect. They should preferably be cut from the same comb, or at least from combs taken from the same super, and must be cut in the same direction, two pieces of comb cut at right angles to one another will be severely penalized, however good they might be individually!

### **Sections**

Sections may be square or round, some shows have separate classes for round sections, while others will not allow them at all, so it is very important to read the rules, which will also tell you what containers are required. Square sections may be exhibited in white section show cases or in commercial cardboard containers. Round sections should generally have clear covers on both sides and no band; either type must be easily removed from the container for inspection by the judge.

All sections should be well filled, with the comb firmly attached all round and with an absence of 'pop-holes'. All the criteria for comb honey apply.

Before exhibiting, the sections should be thoroughly cleaned of any dirt or propolis. A Stanley knife blade, used with care, makes a good scraper.

When a class requires more than one section the rule of uniformity applies and both or all sections must match. One square and one round, however good individually, will not do!! (Unless this is permitted by the rules of the show). More seriously, both sections must contain the same type of honey and have similar capping, preferably produced in the same section rack or super. They must also both be displayed the correct way up. (i.e. the way it hangs in the hive).

### **Chunk Honey**

This is probably the most difficult type of comb honey exhibit to produce, but the end product is well worth the effort involved. The comb should represent at least 50% of the total honey content and these days are usually expected to a single one piece. Traditionally there were anything from 3 - 6 pieces arranged as a 'star' shape. This is illustrated in Herrod-Hempsall's book on showing and judging. It is important to remember that the rule of uniformity still applies, and all jars in the exhibit must match in every respect.

Normally the liquid honey and the comb will be of the same colour. Dark honey does not look attractive in the jar. It is very important to choose honeys that do not granulate readily, for this reason ling heather is often chosen for the comb, with a lighter liquid honey.

When cutting the piece(s) of comb the same criteria should be observed as for the cut comb classes; it should be cut with a sharp knife, using a suitable template, and well drained before placing in the prepared chosen container, it should reach from the base of the jar almost to the top.

The liquid honey should be warmed slightly so that it runs easily and then poured gently down the inside of the jar until level with the top of the jar; a lid should now be screwed on tightly and the jar gently turned upside down and slowly on to one side to allow trapped air bubbles to escape on to the side of the jar. The jar can now be rotated slowly to allow more air bubbles to escape before standing it upright, this process may have to be repeated several times before all the air bubbles have been able to escape

When you are satisfied that the exhibit is free of air bubbles remove the lid and gently pour in more honey if needed, skim the surface to remove any air scum and wax flakes and screw on a clean lid.

The finished exhibit should be free of granulation (in both the liquid and the comb honey), trapped air bubbles and wax flakes.

### **Comb For Extraction**

Combs for extraction come in many sizes, so once again 'check the schedule' to see which are allowed.

Combs should have been drawn on new, wired foundation, preferably fitted in a new frame. The frame chosen to exhibit should be evenly drawn and well capped; it should be heavy for its size.

The honey should all be of one colour, with no sign of granulation and there should be no cells containing pollen or other debris. The capping should be clean and even, without dips and hollows, and clear of the woodwork so that uncapping would be an easy process.

Travel staining and weeping will penalize the exhibit and the presence of wax moth larvae will result in disqualification! Braula trails are not often seen now, but will result in severe penalization if present.

When the frame has been chosen it must be scraped clean of all dirt, propolis, etc. (do not forget the underside of the lugs) before being placed in the showcase. The showcase should be glazed on both sides. The case should be bee tight and the correct size for the frame; it should be easily opened allowing the judge to remove the frame for inspection.

### **Heather Comb**

These are usually intended for sale as comb honey, either complete or for cut comb. All the criteria for comb honey apply with the addition of the requirements for showing frames.

The frames should be new and have been fitted with new thin foundation or 'starter strips', they should be fully drawn and evenly and cleanly capped, and the woodwork should be scraped clean before placing in the showcase.

**Margaret Davies** The judges referee