



TTVBKA

Honey Show Judging Tips & Advice for Exhibitors

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Judging a Honey Show

This is a simple, generic overview of what a honey judge is looking for when judging at a honey show. The most important thing you can do when entering a honey show is to read the show schedule and rules.

The staging criteria and rules stated in an individual Honey Show Schedule always take precedence over the advice given below:

General tips & advice

- Read the show schedule for classes suitable for your experience, skills and interests. Although some of the classes require a considerable amount of effort, and only a few people enter them, there are some classes which need much less work.
- Make sure you read the class specification. Some otherwise excellent exhibits have been disqualified for not being of the correct weight, labelled incorrectly or being made in the wrong size or shape tin for example.
- Your aim should be to present your product in the best possible way – presentation matters but should always comply with the previous point!
- Do ask the Show Secretary, course tutors, experienced beekeepers, people who've won prizes before, for their advice if you're not sure about an entry – it's better to get advice before the show than from the judge!
- If you're not sure if what you've got is good enough, put it in anyway. The judge may well write entries comments on your entry card to help you improve next year
- A lot of classes, particularly if there are a large number of entries, are judged and scores noted on a scoring sheet. This can provide excellent feedback for the entries.
- Some classes are judged on a comparison basis. Provided the item meets a basic standard, the final number of items are compared against each other and prizes awarded accordingly.
- If the exhibit does not comply with class specifications e.g. wrong size jar or your label(s) is not positioned as specified in the schedule, the entry will be instantly eliminated!
- The best tasting honey does not always win (depending on category entered!)

Example of criteria and scoring for Liquid Honey

Maximum points available – 100

Container appearance (Condition and Cleanliness: absence of dust, dirt, smudges, honey or other foreign material on the rim or outside of the container) -	Max 15 points
Accuracy/Uniformity of filling & colours between jars (jars filled to the top of the fill line, consistent colour across jars)	Max points 30
Absence of crystals, insipient granulations	Max 12 points
Cleanliness of Honey (without lint -7; without dirt -7; without wax -7; without foam/scum -7, without air bubbles - 7)	Max 35 points
Density – 0 points but water content above 18.6% & below 15.5% will be disqualified	
Aroma & flavour (points will be reduced ONLY for honey flavour adversely affected by processing, overheating, fermentation, etc)	Max 8 points

The Judge's Case

A judge's case will include the following amongst other useful items:

- A big torch – which makes finding what's in the honey easy
- Tasting rods – the flavour and texture matter a great deal
- A lens to check details such as foreign bodies and a refractometer for water % checks (ideal is 17.4%water)
- Weighing machine and ruler, so make sure your weights and dimensions are as in the schedule
- A copy of the schedule and the rules (which s/he has read carefully)



At most shows it is difficult for the judge to leave feedback on every item, but they will try and leave a note if an entry is particularly good, or if there is an obvious fault. Most judges will give verbal feedback after judging has finished if approached about a particular entry.

Judging Honey in the Jar

Liquid Honey

The judge will usually use a process of elimination, but score sheets may be used. First, they will externally examine the jars:

- is the honey in the correct class?
- if a pair or group, is the colour or the honey identical? Do the jars and lids match?
- is the jar filled to the correct level/not underweight?
- is the lid new and free of dent and scratches?
- Is the jar clean and smear free? are there any visible specks?



A torch will be used to check for debris, clarity (cloudiness) and incipient granulation.

The judge will open the jar and immediately smell the aroma.

The surface will be checked for specks, scum and bubbles on surface. The lid will be checked for honey, dirt or crystals and honey in the threads.

Finally, using a tasting rod, the judge will check the viscosity and taste. If the honey seems very runny, a refractometer to check the moisture content - the upper limit for blossom honey is 20%. The flavour is good and there is no taste of fermentation or contamination (from things like smoke).

Common faults for immediate elimination

- Honey colour or jars and lids do not match as a pair or group
- Underweight/underfilled – check weight of your empty jars, weigh your full ones and subtract/ensure the jar is filled to the correct, the top of the honey should not be visible when the lid is on the jar
- Dirty jar with smears & fingerprints - clean and polish the jar before staging your entry
- Dirt/hair/specks in honey – check with a torch, shine from behind the jar
- Dirty or rusty lids. Dirt or crystals on inside of lid or honey in the threads – keep a spare lid just in case
- Scum or bubbles on surface of liquid. Over-fill the jar(s) enough to allow skimming
- Crystallisation in clear honey including incipient granulation. Pollen cloudiness can be mistaken for crystals, only enter truly clear honey and filter if necessary
- Wrong viscosity, which can lead to fermentation. A smell of fermentation means instant elimination

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Lack of clarity, cloudiness of honey – does it need to be filtered more? Does it need to be warmed?
- Floaters (apart from dirt/debris), such as wax specks and little bubbles – try filtering again and letting settle
- Smears of honey on otherwise clean lid – keep spare lids, just in case
- Poor or lack of aroma
- Poor, boring or lack of flavour
- Too low or high viscosity – 17.4% is the aim, measure before entering

Set Honey

As with Liquid honey, the judge will externally examine the jars checking that they are clean and smear free, with matching lids and jars. There should be no specks or debris at the bottom of the jar or visible in the honey.

For crystallised and soft-set honey, a light creamy colour is preferred. Ling Heather honey must have even size air bubbles.

Set honeys should be 'set' and have no movement in the jar. The surface of both naturally crystallised and soft set honeys should be hard and dry looking, without any 'wetness', signs or fermentation, debris or scum.

The honey should have a good aroma.

Using a tasting rod, the judge will check the flavour and texture. A fine textured honey has preference over a coarse grain, firmness and smoothness are what a judge looks for. Soft-set honey should have 'spreadability', like butter just taken from the fridge.

For Ling honey a tasting rod will be drawn across the surface, any mark should remain. The upper viscosity level for Ling is 23%.

In addition to the faults outlined in 'Judging Liquid Honey':

Common fault for immediate elimination

- High water content, generally above around 20%, can lead to fermentation. A smell of fermentation will be a total eliminator. Temperature control during extraction, checking moisture content and storing correctly can help prevent fermentation

Common fault which can downgrade score

- Ling Heather honey that isn't a true gel, due to other sources (from the bees!)
- Streaks and swirls in set honey

Chunk honey

As with other jarred honeys, external presentation will be initially judged.

The liquid honey should be crystal clear with a piece of comb that fills the glass top to bottom, the ideal is half liquid half comb. The honey should not have any signs of crystallisation and have an even colour.

All cells of the comb should be full, with the same honey that surrounds them; there should be no uncapped cells, pollen or air bubbles in the comb. The cells on the side should slope upwards.

They will open the jar and immediately smell the aroma and then check the surface for specks, scum and bubbles on surface. The lid will be checked for honey, dirt or crystals and honey in the threads.

The judge will taste the honey and the comb. The comb should have a good texture and flavour.

Common faults for immediate elimination

- Comb cut is the wrong way up – don't put it in sideways or inverted

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Floating debris or bits of broken wax anywhere
- Cloudy honey, comb not clearly seen

Judging Comb Honey

Frame of Honey for Extraction

The judge is looking for ease of extraction. The surface of the comb must be level and stand proud of the frame woodwork so that an uncapping knife may be used easily. The frame should feel heavy.



The cells should be uniform, well filled and 100% capped, a few uncapped around the edges is acceptable. When viewed from behind with a torch, there must be a uniform colour with no dark patches indicating occasional cells of pollen and no signs of granulation.

The cappings should be convex, either white or pale yellow, with an absence of travel staining or weeping. There must be no tiny white tunnels visible just under the capping (Braula), there must be no trace of wax moth damage. The judge will use a strong torch to show up any faults.

The frame should be clean and free of propolis, honey and staining.

If using a show case, it should be glazed on both sides, bee tight and the correct size for the frame; it should be easily opened allowing the judge to remove the frame for inspection.

The judge may test just one cell at the edge for quality of honey and absence of granulation.

Common fault for immediate elimination

- Old, dirty frame – a new frame is preferable
- No wire on frame – if the schedule specifies wired
- Too many open cells, weeping

- Travel staining - this is a yellowish stain the appears when the comb has been left in the hive after capping and caused by thousands of tiny bee feet! Removing the frame from the hive as soon as it is capped prevents this.
- Patches of cells with pollen - check with your own torch, shining it through the comb from behind
- Granulated honey in cells
- Debris inside the case

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Too many open cells around the edge - use a pipette to remove any liquid honey from uncapped cells to stop it dripping into the frame holder
- Dusty or smeared case
- Pollen in cells

Cut Comb honey

The judge wants to see uniformity of honey comb (combs often have two or more colours in them), no granulation, no pollen, and a good taste and aroma.

The comb must be presented in a container with a transparent lid unless the schedule specifies differently.



The cut comb should fill the (container) with minimal (preferably none) liquid honey around the comb. The cells should be uniform, well filled and 100% capped. Comb should be cut cleanly with straight, parallel edges.

The comb should look fresh with no signs of debris, pollen, visible brood, discoloured wax, travel stains or crushed wax.

If the class requires a pair, both entries should match in size, colour, and presentation. They should both be cut in the same direction.

The judge will inspect both sides of the comb and may use a torch to check for faults. If a weight or weight range has been specified, the judge may weigh the comb.

The judge will taste the comb. The comb should have no signs of granulation and a good aroma, texture & flavour.

Common fault for immediate elimination

- Pair of combs don't match – preferably both cut from same frame

- Pair of combs don't match in size – use a template
- Pair of combs cut in different directions
- Wire in comb – never use wired foundation for comb honey products
- Too much liquid honey in container - drain on a rack before inserting into the container
- Granulated honey or pollen in cells
- Travel staining on comb

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Liquid honey in container
- Comb too small for container – use a template
- Ragged or uneven edges, crushed wax – use a sharp knife not a cutter

Sections

The judging criteria for Cut Comb is applicable to Sections with the addition of the following standards.

Square sections should be exhibited in white section show cases or in commercial cardboard containers. If the schedule allows round sections, they should have clear covers on both sides and no band.

If the class requires a pair, both entries should match in size, colour, presentation and displayed the correct way up (the way the comb hangs in the hive).

All sections should be well filled, with the comb firmly attached all round and with an absence of 'pop-holes'. The sections should be thoroughly cleaned of any dirt or propolis.

The judge must be able to easily remove the section from the container.

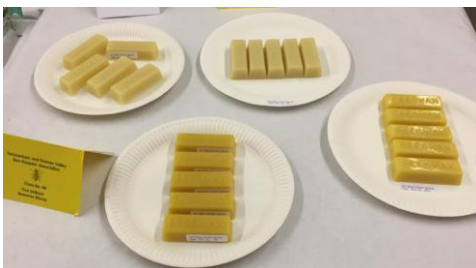
Judging Wax Products

If the class is for several identical items (e.g. wax cakes, candles etc.) they should all match in appearance (and weight, for cakes). Wax cakes should have no bubbles in them anywhere.

Wax blocks

The first thing the judge looks for is a good colour, any colour between pale straw and light orange is acceptable, and translucency of the wax. A torch may be used to check for cloudiness due to water content. Any signs of chemical adulteration or bleaching will be disqualified.

The wax should be clean and free of impurities; the surface should be free of blemishes and dust.



There should be no air bubbles, mould marks, cracks or shrinkage. The bottoms of each block should be flat, and all surfaces should be smooth.

Each block should be identical in appearance and weight, the judge will weigh all blocks

There should also be a pleasant and characteristic wax aroma, the judge may scratch the bottom to release the scent.

Common fault for immediate elimination

- Blocks do not match at all, e.g. clearly different sizes/weights, different wax used or different mould used – only use wax from the same batch, use the same mould for all blocks and always weigh before exhibiting

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Wax too dark – have you overheated it?
- Weight differs slightly across blocks – weigh yourself before entering
- Some blocks have a hollow – check your mould for damage/faults
- Bits of fluff on surface – don't polish with a duster, use finger instead
- No aroma – Don't use melted foundation, only use cappings or free comb

Beeswax Cake

With the exception of the items needing to match, the judging standards for a beeswax cake are identical to Wax Blocks. The Cake will be weighed and measured.

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Cake has wavy lines – Wax cooled too quickly
- Mould markings on surface -only use a smooth mould

Wax Candles

The judge initially checks the appearance of the candle(s). If the class requires, all candles must be identical.

The candles should have a good (and consistent across group) colour, be clean, be well moulded and symmetrical with a good centrally located wick.

The judge will light a candle and note how it burns. The wick should be easy to ignite. There should be a nice even flame and 'melt', with no sputtering from impurities in the candle. The candle is extinguished and the 'smouldering' time noted before lighting again to check how it relights.



Common fault for immediate elimination

- Candles do not match
- Wick not clipped – make sure you clip to the correct size
- Spitting & spluttering flame – dirt and impurities in wax, filtering more may help

Common faults which can downgrade score

- Seams of mould clearly visible and 'felt' when touched – check the quality of your mould, smooth mould seams out with fingers
- Wick not central – check the bottom of the candle for placement
- Hole in the bottom - wax shrinks on cooling so top up if required
- Too much smoke when extinguished - dirt and impurities in wax, filtering more may help

Judging Mead and other honey drinks

The judge will assess the cleanliness and presentation of the bottle. The bottle should be filled to about 1cm from the cork. The drink should be bright and clear with no impurities or floaters, and no sediment after turning the bottle.

Once poured into a glass the aroma is apparent, and the judge will give marks for the bouquet and taste. The flavour should be clean and honeyed, with any extra ingredients pleasant and not overwhelming and have a pleasant aftertaste. Flavour, balance and body are given more weight in the scoring.

Example of Mead scorecard

	Still Meads	Sparkling Meads	Honey Beers
Clarity, color	10	10	10
Flavor, Balance, body and finish	50	40	40
Bouquet, aroma	20	20	20
Bottle	10	10	10
Bottle closure, cork	10	10	10
Carbonation	--	10	10

Judging Collections & Displays



These are classes where you must put a range of items as a group, say two kinds of honey and one wax item.

The items are judged against what would be a perfect specimen within their usual class. Scoring is done via a table, with each item being given a maximum number of points to attain, then adding them up for an overall score.

In the case of a tie, the entry with the most 1st places will be awarded the higher prize.

Judging Food Categories

Baked Goods

Judges will consider the overall visual appeal of the entry. This includes the shape, size, depth, level-top and colour of the baked good, as well as any decorations or garnishes if permitted. The Judge will look for signs of baking skill i.e. evenness of bake, no crusting on surfaces.

The judge will slice into the cake noting ease of cutting and interior colour.



When evaluating the taste, judges will consider the smell, flavour profile, texture and mouthfeel of the entry. If a recipe has been provided, this will be considered when tasting.

The freshness and quality of the ingredients used will be considered. For fruitcake bakes, there should be the right quantity and distribution of fruit throughout the cake. For honey cakes & bakes, there should be a clear smell and taste of honey.

Biscuits should have a uniform size and shape, even colouring and a crisp snap when broken.

Common faults and tips

- Cracked top - try cooking for longer at lower temperature so the mixture expands before the top crusts and splits under pressure from below

- Outside of cake is overcooked whilst the centre is undercooked – try cooking for longer at lower temperature
- Burnt top - cover the top of the cake with baking paper whilst cooking. This can also help with cracking
- Poor crumb structure or a pudding/doughy texture – use the best ingredients especially the flour
- Uneven fruit distribution - if the cake mixture is too liquid, the fruit will sink. Drying the fruit and coating in dry flour before mixing in can help
- Lack of honey flavour or smell - use a good honey with a strong, bold flavour

Preserves

The judge will taste the exhibit, with marks given according to appearance, flavour and aroma being weighted in the overall marks. All jars and containers should be clean and unblemished with the correct lid/ cover and label.

Conserve (jams, marmalades, jellies, etc)

The conserve should be translucent and not “muddy” looking and free from separation into layers, sediment, cloudiness or crystals. The colour should be natural and characteristic of the cooked fruit and free of discoloration, especially from burning or scorching in preparation.

The jar should be filled with a headspace of within 3mm of top of jar. The surface is free from air bubbles and foam.

The consistency should be appropriate to the conserve:

- Jam should be smooth, thick and uniform throughout. It should be easily spreadable; not too stiff and not runny, gummy or syrupy.
- Marmalade should have a thick jelly texture with fruit pieces that are tender, hold their shape and are uniform in size.
- Jelly should be firm enough to hold shape, but tender so it ‘quivers’. The jelly should stay together and not break apart, leaving a clean, sharp edge when cut, not sticky, gummy or syrupy.
- The taste should be characteristic of the natural fruit. Not too sweet or too tart. Not overcooked or burned. The flavour of a conserve should be that of the dominant fruit. It should have no scorched/burned or musty odours.

Chutneys and pickles

Pickles

There must be a good proportion of solids to liquids with the liquid covering all product and a headspace of 12mm left empty. Vegetables are uniform in size and shape with no ragged edges and no loose floating pieces.

The liquid must be clear, free of sediment or cloudiness and have no foreign matter such as stems, leaves, strings, husks. The vegetables are bright with colour characteristic of the product and even throughout the jar. Visible spices are in proportion.

Pieces appear plump, not shrivelled or shrunken and firm in texture. The aroma should be pleasant and not indicate rancidity, mustiness, yeastiness, etc. Spices, flavourings or salt should not overpower the taste.

Chutneys

There should be small pieces of vegetable or fruit that are uniform in size and shape, cut or chopped neatly. They should be reasonably firm in texture, not mushy and evenly distributed. The surrounding pickling solution is thick.

The overall colour is bright and even throughout. There should be no air bubbles or free vinegar in jar. The flavour should be well blended, and characteristic of ingredients used.

The TTVBKA provides this information as general guidance only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and safety, TTVBKA accepts no responsibility or liability for any outcomes resulting from the use of this advice. Exhibitors and beekeepers should exercise their own judgment and consult relevant regulations or professionals where appropriate. Judging criteria may vary between shows and individual judges. Always consult your specific show's schedule, rules and entry guidelines.