

## Honey in Jars

### Liquid honey

Liquid honey is, by far, the most popular category at a honey show. Medium coloured tends to be the prevailing colour of UK honey; hence Light or Dark classes will generally have less entries.

### Preparing for a show

- Select your best honey for clarity, taste, scent and colour
- Select the number of jars required in class and add an additional jar (you will lose some honey through filtering, re-jarring, etc). All jars must be identical in colour.
- Use a BD grading glass to choose the right category to enter. The judges may decide to change the category if they believe it's not the right colour! Categories are:
  - Light,
  - Medium,
  - Dark
- Fine filtering can improve your chances
  - There are many methods and filters available, a new knee-high nylon stocking is a great filter for honey for a show!
  - DO NOT use a lint or cloth filter.
  - Do this job well away from pets and dusty areas

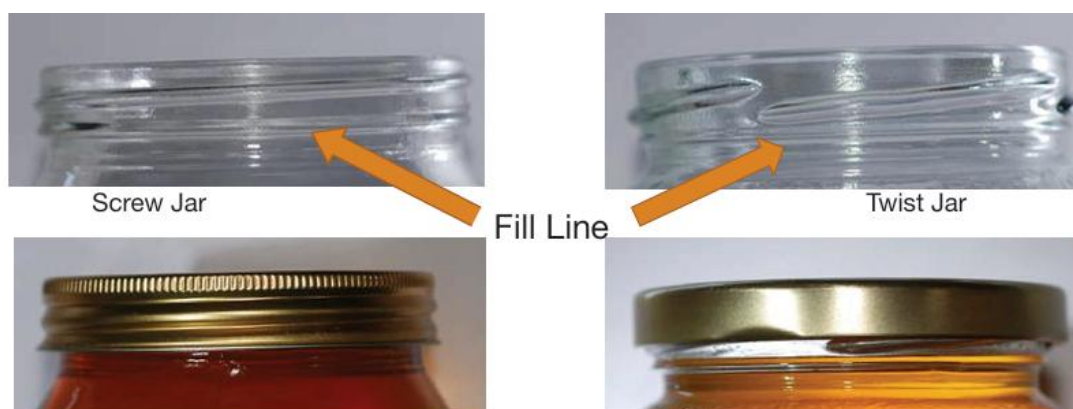
### Jars & lids

- Jars must be identical (same maker and type – look on the bottom)
- Jars must be clear 454 g (1 lb) British Standard squat glass jars
  - Jars must be scrupulously clean
  - Clean with a lint free cloth
  - No marks, scratches or chips
  - DO NOT use plastic jars
- Lids must be standard lacquered crew caps with wad or plastic liner, or white plastic screw caps
  - Lids must be clean, rust free, honey free and matching

- No scratches or dents
- DO NOT use second hand lids in a show

## Bottling

- Bottle honey early as opposed to late
  - Give your honey time to settle and provide opportunity to skim or remove bubbles and/or debris
  - Wrap entire jar in cling film to prevent marking the jar when handling. Remove before setting up at the show
- Get the weight right
  - Fill jars slowly with the jar tipped at an angle to reduce bubbles
  - Fill the jars to the top of the ring on the jar. The ring sits BELOW the thread and is not part of the thread that adheres the lid to the jar
  - When the lid is on you do NOT want to see any air space – see image below
  - It is better to overfill than underfill the jar. You can remove any excess honey with a teaspoon



Jar Fill Lines (Photo by National Honey Show)

## Quality & cleanliness

- Exhibits are marked down by the judges because of incipient granulation.
  - Use a torch to examine your honey ahead of the show to check for granulation
  - Gently heat the honey to reverse the granulation. See ['What is Incipient Granulation?'](#)
- Pollen can easily be mistaken for granulation by a judge so it's best to put in really clear looking jars for showing. Too much pollen can downgrade your entry. Filtering can help
- Remove specks from jars.
  - Use a torch to check for any specks in the honey
  - You can use a tube or straw to suck them out or use a wooden skewer to try and move to the top and dip off with a spoon

- Remove surface debris and bubbles
  - Use a piece of cling film – carefully lay it on top of honey, then lift it off, taking small air bubbles with it with cling film
  - Skim them off with a spoon
  - A toothpick can be used to pop bubbles on the surface

## Get show ready

- A day or two before the show, put your honey in an airing cupboard, a warming cabinet or on the top of a radiator at a gentle heat to give the honey a real gleaming colour
- Always keep your jars upright including when transporting to the show
- Take a fine cloth and polish the outside of the jar so there are no traces of honey, wax smears or finger prints on it
- Take spare lids, just in case. But it's better to keep the lid on as this allows the aroma to build in the jars small airgap
- Make sure your competition/show label is perfectly placed - **always check the official show schedule**
- Viscosity is affected by heat, and exposing your honey to too much heat can make your honey runnier. If the honey appears quite liquid the judge will use a refractometer to test the water content. You should aim for the honey to be around 17-18% water.

## Set honey

### Crystallised, Soft Set & Heather Honey

Crystallised honey is honey that has naturally granulated into a semi-solid form from clear liquid honey and has a grainy texture. Soft set honey has been seeded and vigorously stirred or 'creamed' and has a smoother texture and a flatter more uniform top surface. Heather honey generally refers to ling heather, a 'set' honey that is 'thixotropic' i.e., goes runny when stirred and then reverts to a jelly within a few minutes.

*Bell heather honey is only seen in special places like Ireland and Scotland. It is a clear dark red (Port Wine) and liquid/runny (unlike ling) and has a very distinct and lasting flavour.*

### Crystallised honey

Naturally granulated or 'crystallised' honey is bottled after extraction and allowed to set in the jar.

### Preparing crystallised honey

- Filter the honey during the extraction process, do not over filter as the pollen grains are needed to initiate or 'seed' the granulation process

- Allow time for bubbles to escape in the settling tank. Fill jars slowly. Remove bubbles after 24 hours.
  - A common problem with granulated honey is the phenomenon of 'frosting'.
  - As it sets, the honey contracts and can cause the exposed surface to go white
  - Frosting is usually seen around the neck of the jar
  - Frosting is completely harmless and has no effect on the honey
  - Using jars that have been slightly warmed and avoiding sudden temperature changes when storing can help to avoid this
- To achieve a desirable, smooth & even coloured surface, skim well before final setting and leave to set undisturbed at an even temperature on a level surface
  - The surface should be clean of froth, excessive bubbles and debris
  - The surface should be firm and dry and the texture fine grained, not coarse and gritty
- Store on a level surface at an even temperature. Avoid sudden temperature changes which can cause frosting

## Soft-set honey

Previously referred to as 'creamed' honey (but no longer legal terminology when it comes to labelling because it '*contains no cream*'), has had its crystalline nature broken-up to give a spreadable texture, similar to butter spreads. Many people prefer the smooth, fine texture of soft set honey which cannot be guaranteed with natural setting.

Soft-set honey can be obtained by two methods, 'stirring' or 'seeding'.

### Stirring method

Liquid honey is stirred and kept at a certain temperature to encourage granulation. It is stirred at regular intervals to break up the crystals until the right consistency has been reached. This can be done by hand but generally done with a honey creamer.

### Seeding method

Seeding honey is a somewhat easier way to get an even smooth texture with fine crystals. A small amount, around 10%, of honey with a fine grain and smooth texture, is added to clear liquid honey. As the honey granulates it takes on the consistency of the seed honey. Oil Seed Rape(OSR) honey is a good seed to start granulation in other honeys.

There are various methods, advice and tips on making soft-set honey but in simple terms

- Stir a pound of set (seed) honey and mix with about 20 pounds of liquid honey. Stir, leave and re-stir
- Wait for two to three days until there is some sign of crystallisation
- Bottle slowly and carefully and avoid trapping bubbles
- Seed and stir and bottle about 7 days before the show

## Heather (Ling) Honey

Ling Heather sets like a jelly and has a distinctive taste and smell, colour can vary according to where it came from. A good example of Ling Heather honey is somewhat difficult as bees will forage on other wild flowers. but an authentic jar of Ling Heather honey has lots of air bubbles throughout, that are uniform, not too small, and evenly distributed and a set, jelly-like surface.

The thixotropic nature means that normal extracting is not possible, the honey must be agitated in the cells before placing the frame in a tangential extractor (a radial extractor will not extract ling honey).

A popular way to extract Ling Heather honey is to cut the honey out from the frame, wrap it tightly in linen scrim cloth and press out (there are various types of presses available). This method produces the air bubbles that judges look for.

Due to these air bubbles slightly over fill the jars to get the correct weight of honey. If the bubbles rise the honey is probably a mixture.

When judging, a tasting rod will be used to draw a line on the surface, that line should remain and not fill in.

## Chunk Honey

Chunk honey is considered one of the most attractive presentations of honey - a perfect piece of comb within a jar of clear, runny honey. It can be found in the [Comb classes](#) in most shows.

Like cut comb, preparation of chunk honey can be fiddly!

- The comb should be prepared in the same way as a piece of cut comb
- The comb should be neatly cut and perfectly capped with the cells clearly visible
- The comb should be the width of the neck and the full depth of the jar
- The comb should be placed upright in the jar, the same position as it would be on the frame, so when looked at sideways, the cells are sloping upwards
- The comb should sit on the base of the jar, not floating. A tip is to place the comb in the jar a couple of days before adding the honey. The weight of the comb will form a seal with the bottom of the jar helping to prevent movement
- Carefully pour liquid honey of the same type into the jar trying not to introduce any air bubbles.
- Remove any floating wax and debris from the surface

### A good Chunk Honey should have:

- Evenly coloured, clear liquid honey with no signs of granulation
- Clearly visible 'chunk' of comb that 'fills' the jar
  - There should be no uncapped cells, pollen or air bubbles in the comb (edge are allowed)
  - The cells on the comb should slope upwards
- The comb should represent at least 50% of the total honey content

- Honey in the comb that is the same as the runny honey that surrounds it
- A surface that is free of floating wax and air bubbles

## General tips for jarred exhibits

- Prepare your jars and lids as described for Liquid Honey
- Get the weight right
- Remove specks from glass. Remove surface debris and bubbles
- Take a fine cloth and polish the outside of the jar so there are no traces of honey, wax smears or finger prints on it
- All honeys, especially set, are prone to fermentation, any signs or smells of fermentation will lead to elimination – check moisture levels
- Make sure your competition/show label is perfectly placed, **always check the official show schedule**

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