

Safeguarding Quality of Honey during Extraction

Seasonal Notes for the Domestic Beekeeper

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THE domestic beekeeper may not have much choice of a room to use as a honey house, and sometimes he may have to improvise with whatever is available, but selection of a place that gets the natural heat of sunshine will be a help in keeping stored combs of honey warm before and during extraction. When honey is also being strained into tanks and settling, so that small specks of wax and foreign matter rise to the top, the skimming off can begin earlier before the tanks of honey become prematurely chilled. If honey can be made to clarify quickly and all air bubbles and specks are removed from the surface, the introduction of starter or fine-grained honey can be attended to, thereby reducing one of the bottlenecks in extracting.

THE place where it is intended to extract the honey crop, whether it is a honey house or some improvised building, should have immediate surroundings that are perfectly clean, airy, and dry and there should be sufficient light to all parts of the room. A well-lit and roomy floor space is needed to strain honey adequately of all wax and small particles that would spoil the appearance of the finished product.

Avoiding Dampness

If a honey house is situated in a shady place or on the cold side of a house, dampness will linger on mopped floors and moisture will be drawn to tanks filled with honey. After a cold night beekeepers often find a film of water on tanks of honey, and if this is not skimmed off, there is danger of fermentation taking place later. Every effort should be made to keep floors dry and any drops of honey from supers or utensils should not be left to lie and soak into the floor, for this will inevitably draw moisture and the spores of fermentation will spread from this source. It is a good practice to have a number of metal trays or trays made of sturdy timber to hold columns of supers brought into the honey house. Trays can be made to stand 2 in. clear of the floor so that a store trolley can be slipped underneath and the tray with supers shifted without honey being spilled from dripping combs. Wooden trays should be dipped into hot paraffin wax or painted with boiled linseed oil before being used so that they will not become saturated with honey.

The metal surfaces of tanks and extractor should be thoroughly dry before extraction begins, and the tinned surface should be examined for signs of wear or rust. If boiled linseed oil or spar varnish is wiped round the surfaces that come in contact with honey, especially where the tin has worn thin, any possibility of a chemical action which stains the honey and renders it bitter is eliminated. Treating the interior of home-made tanks with

hot paraffin wax or with aluminium paint as is sometimes done is not so satisfactory, as scratching or chipping can occur more easily when a paddle or stirring stick rubs against the inner surface.

If tanks are stood upside down in a sunny spot to dry, they will not collect dust. When later these containers are filled dust should be excluded by covering them with a piece of sheeting kept moderately tight when stretched over each tank.

In setting up the various utensils to handle the crop the bearing of the lower pivot of the honey extractor should be packed with grease. Rubber steam tubes used the previous season are likely to be perished, and if they need to be replaced, thick tubing is preferable to light tubing and will keep the steam hot over a longer distance. An uncapping plane is less tiring on the wrist than an uncapping knife and is believed by those expert in its use to be faster, but where the supply of steam is produced by a light boiler over a primus or by one containing an electric element the knife appears to receive a better supply to keep it hot enough.

Straining Honey

Straining of honey is likely to involve hold-ups unless one has a simple way of dealing with the blockages that will occur as the material used becomes clogged with wax or honey that is heavy or too thick. Where cheese cloth is used it is desirable to have two or three bags or screens made so that when one becomes clogged it can be replaced. If two pulleys are fixed to the ceiling above each tank, the used bag can be hoisted up by a sash cord to drain while the second is put in position to use. The difficulty of washing the residue from the cloth without exciting bees with the waste watery syrup and the time bags take to drain over a tank are worth avoiding. Various inventions where wire mesh is used are successful, and where the beekeeper has not a large number of hives a simple design is sufficient. If the straining area has a fairly flat surface, it is simple to slide a tin scoop or scraper across the wire gauze and gather up into a bucket the material blocking the flow of honey.

A simple strainer can be made by using a clean spare hive super. A light frame is built to fit the interior surface of the super closely. On to this



[Commercial Studios photo.]
A thin brush (of tussock or manuka) used for brushing down bees from combs.

frame is tacked firmly some brass wire mesh that should not be more open than 16 strands to 1 in. The cut edges of the wire should be overlaid by a light batten and nailed. Four pieces of wood should then be nailed to the inside lower edge of the super and the wire mesh frame rested on this. This super can then be supported over any tank by placing it on a frame that will reach across the tank. Such a strainer can be cleaned easily with a scraper when it shows signs of blocking and it will hold a bucket of honey at a filling. Where honey is very thin it is practicable to have two strainers, the finer mesh immediately below the coarser mesh, but the top one should be movable so that the lower one can be cleaned.

Removing Honey from Hives

At present there is no high-speed method of removing honey from hives. After the hive roof has been removed a generous blowing of smoke over the top of the frames will drive most of bees down to the lower part of the hive.

When most of the bees have deserted the top the whole super is removed and placed on a portable stand, for preference, or on an empty super in front of the hive with one frame removed. This leaves a gap in which a thin brush is swished along each frame to dislodge remaining bees which fall to the grass. The brush is used between all the frames, none of which has to be removed except the first. Before deciding to remove a super of honey the beekeeper should take a quick look down between the frames to estimate if most are capped. At least three-quarters of the surface of a comb should be capped before it is removed to the honey house.