

The **BUZZ** about **BEEES**



By Brenda Visser

Early summer is the time of year many of us have been waiting for. We have said goodbye to a long, cold winter, and are welcoming the warmth, colour, and light that this season brings. Many of us are more active and spending more time outdoors.

Honeybees increase their activity too; their very existence (and ours) depends on this season of growth and harvest. They are

looking for blossoms and colour just as much as we are.

While bee populations have dropped in our region due to disease and other factors, consumer awareness has grown, and the demand for local, raw (unpasteurized) honey has increased to the point that demand is exceeding supply. Wendy Banks of Wendy's Mobile & Country Market in Lyndhurst says that she has sold out of

some particular types of honey, such as a local wildflower honey that she really enjoys, and has even sold out of products for restaurants, such as edible honeycomb.

Banks has had a lot more people asking questions about bees and the health benefits of honey in the last year or two. She says, "People want to know their products- where they are from and who is producing them."
(www.wendyscountrymarket.com)

Facts on honey, such as its history, health benefits, and chemical proportions, are easy to find on the internet. A good place to start is the 'Ontario Beekeepers Association' website (<http://www.ontariobee.com>), which is a treasure trove of information. This site includes a wide range of topics, from Issues & Advocacy, to Pollination Services, to a Kid's Zone, and so much more. You can connect to other beekeepers, or find out where to buy Ontario honey. If you are interested in advocacy, the OBA also has information on the Ontario Bees Act and current legislation efforts.



Beekeeper, Debbie Hutching of Rideau Lakes, located just on the fringes of Leeds-Grenville.

Local raw honey is promoted by many, as it contains vitamins and trace minerals that can be destroyed by pasteurization. A quick browsing of websites and online encyclopaedias reveal that honey can contain vitamin B6, thiamine, niacin, riboflavin, and some amino acids. Trace minerals found may include calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, potassium, sodium and zinc. Honey can be used as a salve on wounds, to soothe a sore throat, or when mixed with ginger and lemon, to settle an upset stomach.

So why is honey pasteurized at all? For commercial purposes, it is easier to handle and it can produce a more consistent colour and clarity in honey that is less likely to crystallize. In addition, pasteurized honey is safer for those who have very weak or not very developed digestive tracts, such as the very young (under one year of age). A dormant spore of the bacteria *Clostridium botulinum*, which is found in soil, may be present in some raw honeys, and in some cases can grow into a toxin-producing bacterium in the gut, causing botulism poisoning. From my simple research, however, this seems to be rare.

The interest in honey and the health of bees has grown so much that a March Seminar entitled "Keeping Bees and Making Honey" held in the Escott Library/Springfield House was filled to capacity, with a waiting list. Debbie Hutchings, 4th generation beekeeper, said the response was so overwhelming that a second free seminar was held in April. This workshop specifically informed those who are interested in starting beekeeping as a hobby or small business, and topics included start-up costs, equipment needs, time required, and honey yields.

Hutchings says that she thinks the best way for someone to learn beekeeping is "hands-on in the bee-yard". She enjoys mentoring new beekeepers, and offers paid beekeeping workshops from her farm, "Debbee's Bees" on the Hutchings Family Farm in Rideau Lakes. She also has beekeeping supplies available. (See her website for more information: debbeesbees.ca, or call 613-483-8000).

A beekeeper that optimizes the management of one hive can be rewarded with up to 100 pounds of honey in just one season. A sweet bonus for giving nature a boost in survival!



Honey is classified by its floral source—wildflower, clover, apple— and by its colour—white, golden, amber, dark. There are other regulations as well, such as country of origin that is important for those who sell this product. Those wishing to make money from their backyard crop may need to label it according to standards set by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The details for this can be found online (see omafra.gov.on.ca).

The plight of bees has frequently been in the media in recent years. Much has been studied and spoken of regarding the issues that face them. Pesticide use, disease, and loss of habitat are some reasons why the

bee populations in our region, and all over North America, have faced serious declines. We should all take note, and do our best to promote healthy bee populations, since their well-being has a direct influence on our own well-being. Despite the occasional sting we may receive, bees' beneficial work of pollination far outweighs any negatives. That is true even without the fringe benefit of honey!

Local honey can be found throughout the year, but especially now, at Farmer's Markets and roadside markets, such as Beverley Shores Honey in Delta, or the Tincap Berry Farm. Be sure to try some out and be a locavore! Sweet! **LH**