



My friends and relatives always know what they are getting for Christmas: honey! Most of them enjoy it, but when their kitchen cabinets start to bulge with my accumulated generosity, maybe it's time to be a little more creative. But what could be a better gift than honey? How about new and improved honey?

Honey is wonderful but sometimes it does get messy. Wouldn't a ham and honey biscuit be even better if the honey didn't drip off the bread? The answer is creamed honey, also called creamed or spun honey. Creamed honey is popular elsewhere in the United States but it seems that most of us born here in North Carolina have never heard of it. Despite its novelty around here, creamed honey is fairly easy to produce and makes a terrific gift.

How it works

Basic creamed honey is 100% pure honey that is processed in such a way that it has the consistency of peanut butter. People often add flavorings such as chocolate and cinnamon; that's your choice.

Creation of creamed honey takes advantage of the fact that all pure honey will eventually crystallize. If we provide very fine crystals as a starter, as fine as dust, the honey will crystallize according to the pattern that's provided. The starter can be a dry powder or a bit of previously-prepared creamed honey. You will have to look around for a grocery store that carries creamed honey; for example, Food Lion doesn't but my neighborhood Harris Teeter does.

Preparation

One trick for making the best creamed honey is to prepare the liquid honey beforehand. Make a hot-box by stacking two empty deeps and putting a couple of 100-watt lights inside. Leave a bucket of honey in the hot-box for a day or two, making sure that it doesn't get too warm. You don't want to cook the honey, just gently warm it. This has two purposes:

- 1) it melts honey crystals that may already be in the honey
- 2) it encourages specks of pollen to precipitate out

Random crystals and pollen can cause your creamed honey to granulate crudely, causing the product to feel a bit grainy in the mouth. The hot-box treatment helps prevent that.

After the heat-treated honey has had plenty of time to cool back down to room temperature, I put 10 pounds (a little less than a gallon) into the largest bowl that fits my wife's Sunbeam mixer. To this I add about a pound of starter – creamed honey I buy at the grocery store. I've found that the best starter is one that is similar to the honey you are blending it with. Precise proportions aren't critical but a ratio of about 10 pounds liquid honey to 1 pound starter is ideal. Note that you can make a whole bucket's worth of creamed honey using a paint mixing drill but I prefer to make small batches using a regular kitchen mixer.

The goal is to mix without whipping in lots of air. You can use regular beaters, but my wife's mixer has special bread hooks which are perfect for this purpose. Blend on a low to medium setting for five to ten minutes, or as long as it takes to thoroughly mix the starter with the liquid honey. The final appearance of the honey should be uniformly opaque without marbling or streaking.

Bottling

Pour the blended mixture into a bottling bucket (a five gallon pail fitted with a

gate). Set this aside for about three days to allow the bubbles and foam to float to the top. The blended goop will still be fluid at this point, but don't let it set much longer or it won't flow. Bottle into suitable containers. One-pound snap-top tubs, similar to what pimento cheese comes in, are perfect. Wide mouth jars, the type used for peanut butter, also work very well.

When you are buying containers from a beekeeping supply house, the container capacity is usually expressed in honey weight. But if you are buying from a generic container company, remember that 12 ounces by volume is equal to 16 ounces of honey by weight.

Final step

Put your full containers in the refrigerator for about three weeks. During this time the honey will firm up into a creamy, spreadable consistency.

Once the granulation process is complete, your creamed honey is ready to go. Like any pure honey, it does not require refrigeration to remain healthful. However if creamed honey gets a bit warm (above upper 70s), it will start to turn soupy and may even melt completely. Once it has completely liquefied, it is now liquid honey and it won't re-granulate unless you repeat the whole process described above. So keeping creamed honey in the refrigerator, or at least a cool basement, isn't a bad idea during the summer.

If you start right now you should be able to whip up a batch of creamed honey just in time to give to your favorite people on Christmas morning. Try it!

Your turn

Is there a topic you would like to see in these articles in 2014? Feel free to send me suggestions; include "Bailey's Newsletter" in the subject line. In the meantime, I hope your

beekeeping adventures are successful, or at least fun!

Randall Austin is a NC Master Beekeeper who keeps a few honey bee hives in northern Orange County. He can be reached at s.randall.austin@gmail.com.

Copyright 2013, no reproduction in whole or in part without permission of the author.