

# TASTING AND DESCRIBING YOUR HONEY

## PRESENTATION NOTES



*The combination of floral diversity, season, and environment cause a variation in the composition, concentration, and profiles of the phenolics in honey. (Marshall et al., 2014)*

### CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY HONEY

- Honey from different regions and different seasons will taste and look different – like fine wine, that’s what makes it special.
- Colour and flavour are not consistent. The only way to achieve consistency is through controlled blending – but the subtle qualities of individual honeys would be lost.
- High quality honey is not necessarily clear – it is often cloudy.
- Crystallization is a characteristic of unpasteurized/raw honey – it is not a defect
- Colour, aroma, flavour, and texture vary by location, season, and year-over-year.
- Final product is a result of a handful of main floral sources + many minor sources of nectar.

### TERROIR (NOT JUST FOR WINE ANYMORE)

- Terroir is the characteristic flavour and aroma imparted by the environment.
- In his “Survey of American Honeys”, Jonathan White noted that alfalfa honey from Southern California was darker, stronger in flavour, and more prone to granulation than alfalfa honey produced in the Rocky Mountain region.
- A strong growing season for a given plant will affect a honey's flavour from year to year, as will crop rotations on nearby farms.
- Differences in temperature and humidity in microclimates affect nectar secretion and concentration in bee forage.

### PROVENANCE

- Place of origin, source; the region in which a food was produced.
- Highly valued and recognized: Roquefort cheese, Basmati rice, Champagne, Kobe beef
- Tupelo honey: From the Apalachicola River basin in Florida panhandle and Okeefenokee Wildlife Refuge on Georgia-Florida border
- France’s miel d’Alsace – Protected Geographical Indication

*Worker bees in any given hive collect different proportions of nectar from different floral sources. No two honeys will taste exactly the same. (Persanno & Bogdanov, 2004)*

### MONOFLORAL/VARIETAL HONEY

- Single (predominant/primary) nectar source from which a honey takes its distinctive flavour, aroma, and colour.
- Buckwheat – dark, strong, thick, molasses. Basswood – greenish tinge, minty flavour.
- Difficult to produce as vast acreages are required.

### POLYFLORAL/WILDFLOWER HONEY

- Easy to produce – bees harvest the best nectar available.
- Difficult to identify individual components/sources.
- Complex flavour profiles due to unique blend of nectars specific to a given location (changes season-to-season and may change year-to-year).
- From multiple/unknown nectar sources producing an endless variety of colours, textures, aromas, and flavours (a handful of main floral sources + many minor sources of nectar).
- Value is in regional differences.
- Identified by place/provenance, not nectar source.

*What "wildflower" means varies by region.  
New England teems with clover, berries, goldenrod and sumac.  
The western Rocky Mountains have cactus, yucca, agave, alfalfa, and mesquite.  
So a New England and a Western wildflower honey will have noteworthy differences.  
Jacqueline Raposo, "How to Taste (and Fall in Love With) Raw Honey"*

#### **TASTING YOUR HONEY**

- Use all of your senses: colour, aroma, clarity, texture, taste (sweet, sour, salty, and bitter), flavour.
- Honey is not just sweet – floral, grassy, fruity, woody, etc.
- Take your time – notice when flavours appear: beginning, middle, finish.

#### **COLOUR**

- Hold the sample up to the light and observe the colour. Use a Jack's Scale for better accuracy.
- Is it clear or cloudy? Is it transparent or opaque?

#### **CONSISTENCY**

- Give the honey a stir, smearing it along the inside of the container.
- Take note of the consistency – is it runny or thick? Smooth or granular?
- Is it crystallized? If so, are the granules small or large?
- (You'll make further observations about the texture once you sample the honey.)

#### **AROMA**

- Cup your hands around the container to warm the honey, then give it another stir.
- Smell the honey by getting your nose in close and inhaling deeply.
- Take note of what you smell – fruity, floral, earthy, etc.

#### **FLAVOUR**

- Take a spoonful of honey and place it on your tongue.
- Allow the honey to melt as you observe the texture and flavour, the intensity and persistence.
- Notice any changes in the flavours from beginning to finish – weak to strong, fleeting to lasting.
- Notice where in your mouth you experience the honey.

#### **DESCRIBE THE TASTE**

- Starting at the centre of the tasting wheel, look for terms that broadly describe your experience.
- Take another taste and work your way outwards on the wheel, finding more specific descriptors.

#### **TEXTURE**

- As you're tasting the honey, take note of the texture. Is it runny or thick? Slippery, smooth, granular?
- Press the honey against the roof of your mouth. How does it feel? Is it smooth or granular?
- Avoid caffeine, cigarettes, alcohol, and spicy/strong-tasting food food pre-tasting.
- Cleanse your palate between samples with sliced green apples, plain crackers, and/or water.
- For best results, sample your honeys several times over the course of a few days.
- Training your palate is a skill that takes practice.

#### **• TASTING WHEELS CAN BE FOUND AT:**

- <https://ucdavisstores.com/MerchDetail?MerchID=1333237>
- [www.americanhoneytastingsociety.com/product-page/honey-aroma-and-flavor-wheel](http://www.americanhoneytastingsociety.com/product-page/honey-aroma-and-flavor-wheel)