

Honey

Honey is not just a term of endearment and a miracle healer; it really has achieved an almost symbolic status for all that is good and sweet in the world.

Honey has been used since ancient times and is one of the oldest foods on the planet. Jewish culture Rosh Ha Shana is often depicted by honey and apples and indicates a sweet new year. In Buddhism, honey is given to monks to commemorate the festival of Modhu Purnima. In Christian tradition honey is mentioned 61 times in the King James Bible.

Honey is made from the nectar of thousands of plants; the nectar is collected and concentrated by honey bees. It is a completely natural product. It is known that to make just one 500g pot of honey, the bees may travel a distance equivalent to flying around the world three times.

Honey varies in taste and formation depending on its source. The honey usually takes on the taste of the most prolific of the plants the nectar is gathered from. It is not often that you can get a monofloral honey which is honey made from the nectar of only one plant. If you do find it, expect to pay a bit extra.

Honey comes in a variety of different forms. The most common honey is liquid honey. This is a commodity product and may simply be a mixture of what is the cheapest honey from several countries. Liquid honey is free of crystals and is heat-processed and filtered a number of times. Whipped honey is sold already crystallised and at room temperature; it can be spread as if it were butter.

Specialist honey has a taste of the plants from that area. It can be from mixed flora or a single plant. Because bees gather the honey from only within a few miles of their hives, beekeepers can influence where and what the bees feed on. This results in a certain style and flavour of honey. Some examples are: Greek mountainside honey, rosemary honey, acacia honey, Scottish heather honey, Manuka honey from New Zealand, orange blossom honey, Spanish lavender honey.

Honey is a versatile ingredient. Apart from being popular served on toast, it can be used in a variety of ways. Try using it in marinades, sauces, ice cream, puddings, to sweeten fruit and natural yogurt and in cakes and bakes.