

## Honey and Beeswax Products.

What can we say except that we love honeybees! Honey bees are essential to our lives and livelihoods. We have raised honeybees for over forty years, primarily to pollinate our organic gardens, fruit trees and berry bushes. As years went by, we just kept adding hives. When he is out and about, Mark will tell folks, I need to get home to my girls. Invariably, they will ask how many girls he has, and he says "so many that I can't count them"! Of course, he is talking about his honey bees, and being a matriarchal society, the queen rules. What is there that a girl cannot love about that!

All kidding aside, honeybees are essential to humans. They pollinate our gardens, fruit trees and bushes; and, without their pollination, our plants would not bear fruit. Then, where would we be? Quite hungry, we suspect. So, our goal has been to encourage and mentor others to raise honey bees, whether as a hobby or to take it to the next level.

A hive of honey bees is composed of a queen (who rules!), worker bees and drones. These bees all work together to create a perfect environment for producing natural honey. Honey bees must visit millions of blossoms in their lifetimes. They collect nectar and pollen from these blossoms and bring it back to their hives. The nectar is stored in the hexagonal comb of the bee hive. Nectar straight from the flower is very liquid and the bees use their wings to constantly fan the honey and cause the excess moisture to evaporate. This creates the thick, sweet liquid that we know as honey. When the bees have the honey cured to just the right moisture content, they cap the honeycomb cells with wax.

Our honey bees begin gathering pollen and nectar from the very first blossom in the spring until winter sets in. Often the first thing to blossom are the maple trees and pussy willows, followed by the earliest flower, the dandelion. The apple and fruit trees are soon to follow.



There is nothing better than sitting under a blossoming apple tree and listening to the constant hum of the honey bees working. Raspberry bushes, the garden plants (the bees especially love the marjoram and broccoli blooms), and then the wild flowers, such as lupins and golden rod. Our lawns and yard are "bee" friendly and we let all plants blossom until they are spent. You may think that our lawns look a bit unkempt, however, if you look closely, the honey bees will be working all those dandelions, white and purple clover, and mustard plants. You name it, if it has a flower or bud on it, our bees will be working it!

We harvest our honey once per year, so our raw, local honey is a compilation of all the local flowers and blossoms. We are lucky to have a neighbor who grows organic flowers for the local markets and florists, and we have an apiary at another neighbor who has organic gardens and blueberries. We find the combination of all these flowers provides a wonderful taste and aroma to our honey. There are many folks who may not agree with our love for all these flowering plants because they have allergies, think goldenrod for example. However, over the years, many of these folks have found that a teaspoon or so a day of raw honey allows them to build up a resistance to triggers of their allergies.

Once the honey has been capped in the hive, that is our sign that it is ready for extraction. The frames of honey are uncapped manually and spun in a manual extractor which is a centrifuge which forces the honey out of the comb. Then, we bottle it and have it available for our customers. Occasionally, a frame of honey will come apart and we bottle this as well. It includes the actual honeycomb and honey and is a wonderful treat.

For years, we sold our excess honey to local customers. Then, when I retired from my outside job, I began to experiment with making products from the beeswax. At first, I made it for just ourselves and as gifts, but then everyone wanted different scents and products and off I went.



I make only small batches of my soaps, lotions and lip balms. I also make a wide variety of beeswax candles, which smell just like honey. When I participate in the craft shows, I have to be sure that the young ones know that the candles are not candies!

Often times, customers will tell me that their skin is very sensitive to scents in lotions and soaps because of various allergies. So, one variety of my soap has only beeswax and honey for the scent and has been found to be very soothing. One of my lotions is unscented as well. In addition, many times customers with sensitive skin will try my products and find they enjoy using them. I believe that this is because I use all natural ingredients and do not use any preservatives. The lotion bar is used by many of my customers that have eczema. The lotion bar contains a higher percentage of beeswax than my liquid lotions. As you rub the lotion bar onto your skin, the oils soak in and the beeswax provides an additional protection to keep the oils in and to keep moisture out. This gives any irritated skin an extra chance to heal. My decorative guest soaps and small jars of honey also make wonderful favors for a wedding celebration. The guests were so pleased to have something they could actually use and enjoy.

Arlene Wren

