

The free email newsletter on good food and drink.

Rosh Hashanah Newsletter



The disappearance of the honey bee

Over the last three years more than one in three honey bee colonies have died nationwide and nearly all colonies in the wild have died out, posing a serious risk to our natural food supply. Bees are kept for the honey and wax that they produce and for the crops that they pollinate. Without beekeepers to care for them, in a few years honey bees could disappear.

Read on and learn about honeybees, the possible causes of their disappearance and the effect they have on a whole range of food products. What alternatives are available if honey becomes a luxury food item? Also enclosed are some quick and easy recipes using natural sweeteners.

Entertaining The Easy Way

It's so easy to host the perfect Rosh Hashanah meal, dinner or party and being the host shouldn't mean that you can't enjoy the event every bit as much as your guests.

Tastes of the World's food ordering and catering service lets you entertain without spending hours shopping or cooking. If you are inviting guests let us help you lighten the load.

Order just a few dishes or an entire menu including any furniture and equipment you require. Each order is individually prepared to your specific requirements, made with high quality ingredients without any added colors or food additives.

For our full menu, just send me an email request to Tastes of the World:
shalet@bezeqint.net

Please forward to all your friends and colleagues so they can register to receive their own copy – see below

Bee careful with your honey

Honeybees have been in existence for about 25 million years and are ideally adapted to their natural environment. Honeybees evolved from wasps but unlike wasps which are carnivores, honeybees are herbivores. To collect half a kilo of honey a bee might have to fly a distance equivalent to twice round the world, and visit two million flowers. Honey bees do not only pollinate many beautiful flowers - about one third of the food that we eat is pollinated by honey bees, including more than 100 crops including fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, some of which become part of the feed for farm animals.

Strange uses of bees and honey

Throughout the ages, bees have been used as weapons. Beehives were dropped or thrown at opposing soldiers. As recently as 1915 in Africa, the German army used bees to delay the advance of British troops.

Because of its antiseptic properties, during the First World War honey was used to dress soldier's wounds. In the Second World War it was used until penicillin became available. Honey is still claimed to be good for treating open sores and ulcers.

Possible causes of the bee's disappearance

Over the last two decades the varroa mite, a tiny crab-shaped parasite which sucks the blood of honeybee pupae and honeybees, has swept across the world. This can destroy a colony in a few years.

Another cause of these losses is an alarming phenomenon called Colony Collapse Disorder, or "CCD." When a hive experiences CCD, the honey bees mysteriously desert their hive and die. CCD symptoms have been reported by more than thirty-five states across the U.S. and in many other countries. Researchers do not know exactly what causes CCD, but they believe there may be many factors contributing to the problem, including viruses, mites, chemical exposure and poor nutrition.

Because of the increased cost in beekeeper-time to maintain colonies, many beekeepers have stopped keeping bees.

How we can help

Where there are few agricultural crops, honey bees rely upon garden flowers for a diverse diet of nectar and pollen. Encourage honey bees to visit your garden by planting single flowering plants, bees like daisy shaped flowers and sunflowers, tall plants such as hollyhocks and foxgloves.

Bee friendly

Bees only sting when provoked and unfortunately female bees die in the process. If a bee hovers inquiringly in front of you, do NOT flap your hands. Stay calm and move slowly away, best into the shade. The bee will soon lose interest.

Improvements

Beekeepers are seeing results from new practices and added nutritional supplements that are helping to make bees stronger and less susceptible to whatever is causing the disorder. There is a slight improvement in the number of bees this year compared to last year, the number of bees who died off this year has dropped from 30 percent to 20 percent - however this is still a significant number.

Answers through research are urgently needed otherwise we may be dipping our apples into maple or date syrup next Rosh Hashanah.

Donations

A lot of research is needed to help stop the demise of the honey bee. One campaign, known as “Häagen Dazs Loves Honey Bees”, was developed to increase awareness of CCD and to generate research dollars to help find out what is causing the disorder, visit <http://www.helpthehoneybees.com/>

Other bee associations are also raising money for research, visit www.britishbee.org.uk

Sugar

We all need a bit of sweetness in our food, but using too much refined white sugar makes us fat, rots our teeth, is linked to diabetes, hyperactivity in children and heart disease – it provides no nutrients, only calories. To make matters worse its addictive, as blood sugar levels are raised, the pancreas sends insulin to lower the level, causing a rapid fall, which leaves a craving for more sugar; and so continues the vicious circle which is usually linked with moody ups and downs.

Sugar alternatives

Honey

This has slightly fewer calories than sugar and is sweeter so you use less. It contains traces of vitamins and minerals. There is no nutritional difference between clear and set honey.

Apart from spreading it on your toast, use honey as a sweetener to replace sugar in desserts, drinks and in baking. Stir honey into plain yoghurt or use it

as the basis for a sticky marinade for chicken or a glaze for vegetables - honey and mustard is a great combination.

Clear honey has a tendency to crystallise after time, but just put the jar in a jug of hot water for a minute or so and it will turn clear again.

Molasses or Treacle

This contains minerals especially calcium and iron and vitamins. It has a strong flavor so you do not need to use very much.

This thick, dark, heavy syrup is a by-product of sugar refining. It's far less sweet than syrup or honey and the darker the molasses, the less sugar it contains. Molasses has a strong distinctive flavor, so you don't need very much. Its used in traditional recipes such as Boston baked beans, rich fruit cakes, gingerbread and treacle toffee, treacle puddings and treacle tarts, rye bread, and shoofly pie.

The word molasses comes from the Portuguese word melaço, which ultimately comes from mel, the Latin word for "honey".

Maple Syrup

Not as sweet as honey but it does contain calcium and potassium.

The boiled-down sap of the maple tree is expensive because of the low yield from the sap (40 gallons of sap are needed for one gallon of syrup!) but the cheaper imitations labelled 'maple-flavoured syrup' made from a mixture of maple syrup and cane syrup just don't compare with the real thing and should be avoided.

True maple syrup from Canada and the north-eastern states of the US carries a maple leaf mark to guarantee its authenticity. It's a little luxury to pour over pancakes or waffles or over ice cream and can be used in baking or even savoury dishes

Date syrup

This dark brown syrup is extracted from dates. It is very sweet and has a distinctive flavor. It is very versatile and can be used wherever honey, molasses, treacle, syrup or sugar are traditionally used.

Other natural sweeteners

Juice concentrates; pear, apple, orange, fruit juice, dried fruits; apricots, dates, raisins, sultanas, figs and date or apricot puree.

Recipes

Maple Pecan Muffins- Particularly good for breakfast

Mix together

125g pecan nuts, roughly chopped (reserve 30g for decoration)
275g plain flour
4 tsp baking powder
Pinch salt
50g wheat germ

Whisk together

125ml milk
125ml maple syrup (or other natural sweetener)
125ml corn oil
1 egg

Topping

1 tbsp dark brown sugar

Heat oven to 200 °C, fill muffin tin with paper cases.

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and mix to combine the two, do not over mix. It's actually good to leave it a bit lumpy as it makes a better muffin. Spoon into the paper cases. Mix reserved nuts with brown sugar, sprinkle on top of each muffin and bake for 20 minutes. They will not turn very golden, but are ready when they are well risen. Remove from the tin to cool, eat while still warm.

Teriyaki glaze – mix black treacle and soy sauce, 1 tablespoon of each. Use to marinate salmon (30 minutes) or chicken (for 2 hours).

Golden syrup marinade or glaze

Mix 1 tbsp golden syrup, 1 tbsp soy sauce, half a tbsp ketchup and quarter of a clove of garlic crushed. Pour over meat and marinate for 2 hours. Alternatively use the same mixture as a glaze for roasted vegetables (onions, carrots, potatoes or sweet potatoes) add during the last 10 minutes of roasting.

Tahini and date syrup dip or spread

Mix 1/2 cup date syrup, 1/2 cup tahini, 1 - 2 tablespoon fresh lemon juice. Add a little water if the mixture seems too thick and season.

Chocolate Honey glaze for cakes

This is a wonderful topping for any sponge or honey cake.

60ml water

125ml runny honey
175g dark chocolate, chopped
75g icing sugar

Bring the water and honey to the boil, remove from heat and add chocolate. Swirl it around to melt in the hot liquid. Leave for a few minutes, whisk together, sieve in the icing sugar, then whisk again until smooth. Leave to harden for at least an hour.

Wishing all my subscribers a very happy and sweet New Year

Shannah Tova

Warm regards

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