Honey

The Miracle of Bees

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The next time you find yourself dodging a bee, reflect upon the miracle of what this tiny creature produces. Once considered food for the gods, reserved for royalty and the rich, honey has crossed centuries of our imaginations and our taste buds.

How bees make honey is a rather straightforward but fascinating process. The bees gather nectar from a flower which mixes with enzymes in their saliva to make honey. Once the bees have returned to their hive, they deposit the substance into cells in the hive's walls. Excess moisture is removed by the fluttering of the bees' wings, making it ready for consumption.

The variety of honey is limited only by what grows in a given area. The taste and texture of honey is determined by where the bee gathers its nectar and its color can range from white to golden, to deep red or even shades of brown and black.

Benefits

Raw honey offers the most health benefits, containing a combination of glucose and fructose and small amounts of proteins, amino acids, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. Raw honey is also believed to have antimicrobial properties and may benefit wound healing. When honey crystallizes, avoid heating it in a microwave, which may destroy its beneficial properties — instead, heat the container in a small pan with water.

Consuming high-quality raw, local honey is also believed to lessen allergies, especially if taken a few months prior to allergy season. Raw honey often contains pollens from the plants providing nectar for the bees.

Researchers from Penn State College of Medicine found that a single dose of buckwheat honey proved more beneficial in children (aged two to 18 years) with upper respiratory tract infections of seven days or less in symptomatic relief of nocturnal cough and sleep difficulty compared to a single dose of dextromethorphan, found in many over-the-counter cough syrups like Robitussin® Pediatric Cough Suppressant. (Honey is not recommended for children under two years of age due to the risk of infantile botulism.)

Sweet Treat

Honey can be a delicious addition to tea, mixed into yogurt, drizzled over fruit or hot cereal, or used as a substitute for sugar. To replace one cup of sugar in baked goods, use one half to three-quarters cup of honey and reduce liquids by one-quarter cup. Reducing the cooking temperature by 25 degrees is also helpful since honey causes foods to brown more easily.

To find local honey sources, visit local farmers' markets (www.certifiedfarmersmarket.ning.com) or ask your grocer if they carry raw, local honey.

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