

SUGGESTIONS FOR SHOWING HONEY

1. Select the honey you wish to enter:

Pass the honey through the finest filter you have. The set of three sieves sold for this purpose by bee supply houses works very well, especially when the honey is warm from the hive on extracting day. Never use cheesecloth because it has many loose fibers. Also be very cautious with old pantyhose; they contain dyes that can affect the color and flavor of your honey.

Allow the honey to sit in a warm place for as long as possible so that debris and air bubbles rise to the top. Skim off the foam and debris with a spoon, and repeat the process a couple of more times if possible.

If the show you plan to enter is several months away, you may want to freeze a one-half gallon jar of the honey until closer to the time of the competition. The half gallon jar of honey is more than enough to fill the four competition jars you will want for the show. Freezing is the best way to preserve the flavor, fragrance, and general quality of the honey.

2. Select the jars you will use:

Never, at any time throughout this process, use Windex or any other cleaning aid on the inside or outside of the jars. The slightest residue of fragrance will be noticed by the judges. No cotton swabs ever.

The standard container for honey judging is the 1 lb., #2 glass Queenline jar. If you are choosing four jars from a large number of jars, try to find ones with as few blemishes in the glass as possible. The judges, however, recognize the difference between blemishes in the glass and faults in the honey. Your actual entry will be three identical jars, but it is wise to prepare four jars, just in case there is a problem with one or you need extra identical honey to add to one of your three competition jars. The molded white plastic lids are by far the nicest.

Wash the jars thoroughly inside and out with a bottle brush and detergent. Check each jar for the tiny numbers put on at the factory. These can be in a single line about one inch down from the top, or in a square pattern about two inches from the bottom, in both cases, on the flat surface. These can be removed with soapy water or alcohol on a soft cloth. Rinse the jars inside and out in very hot or boiling water until there are no bubbles remaining.

Allow to air dry. Leave the jars up side down for about 10 minutes. Tap each jar on a folded cloth to knock out any remaining water droplets. Invert the jars, stand upright, and cover with a clean, lint-free cloth. Do not dry inside the jar with a cloth because this can leave behind fibers that will show up in the judging. However, look very carefully for any water that may be lurking in the dip where the inside wall of the jar meets the bottom. This can be hard to see. A flat weave cotton or linen cloth folded around the tip of a table knife can be used to dab this up.

3. Fill your four selected jars:

Pour the honey into your jars, filling to within a couple of hairs of the rim, almost to the point of overflowing. Cover with a small piece of plastic wrap, put on the lid, and set aside in a warm place. (You may want to wrap the jars carefully, pack securely in a carton, and put in the trunk of your car. The warmth and jiggling encourages bubbles and impurities to rise to the top.) Check once a week, skimming any foam or particles that have risen to the top, and recovering with a new piece of plastic wrap. If there isn't much time until the competition, the jars may be placed in a container of hot water, not hotter than 120 degrees, to encourage the bubbles to rise. Keep in mind that exposing honey to high

temperatures changes the flavor. For this reason, avoid microwaving the honey; the temperature is too difficult to control in a microwave. Look at the honey with a strong light behind the jar to check for bubbles and other impurities. These can sometimes be teased out with a thin wire or skewer.

4. Make final preparations for the competition:

Some notes on cloths: It is not a good idea to have “a special” cloth for wiping the jars. Instead you should plan to have at least one cloth for each jar of honey in your entry. Very old, oft’ laundered, flat weave cotton or linen dish towels or men’s handkerchiefs work well for all the jar cleaning you will want to do from this point on. Never include fabric softener when laundering these cloths.

A week or two before the competition, set out your jars, and locate what looks like an O ring of glass on the outside of the jar that aligns with the bottom of the lid when the lid is screwed on. Your goal is to have the surface of the honey precisely at the top of this ring when you set the jars on the competition table. First, remove the lids and the piece of plastic wrap. Remove any bubbles or other bits that are on the surface of the honey and around the mouth of the jar. Once this has been done, using a small spoon, the tip of a knife, or a chopstick, dip out honey to lower the level of the honey in the jar to just above the glass ring. Clean the rim of the jar carefully, using a barely damp cloth. Cover the jar with a new piece of plastic wrap, wash the lid, rinse with very hot water, dry well, and screw onto the jar. Set aside in a warm place. Check the surface of the honey the day before the contest, just in case. Put on a new piece of plastic wrap, and close the jar.

5. The day of the competition, at home or in the hotel:

Prepare a small box in which to carry your jars of honey to the competition, or use the same one in which you transported the honey to the hotel. Include cloths to protect the jars in transit; lint free cloths to wipe the outsides of the jars; damp, lint free cloths in a plastic bag if you won’t have access to water at the competition site; and some tooth picks or skewers.

Open the jars, remove the plastic wrap, with a toothpick lift out any bits that may be on the surface of the honey. Using a clean toothpick or skewer, carefully dip out the last few drops of honey to make the level perfectly aligned with the glass ring on the neck of the jar. Wipe the neck of jars with a slightly damp lint free cloth, dry, place a new piece of plastic wrap on each jar, clean the outer lid, dry, and screw onto the jar. Pack carefully into the box.

6. In the honey judging area:

Unpack the jars, remove the outer lids, then the plastic wrap. The neck of the jars should be very clean at this point, but wipe one last time with a slightly damp, lint free cloth, and dry. You don’t want any stickiness on the jar, inside or out, or on the lid. Look one last time for any particles on the surface of the honey, and screw on the lids, not too tight and not too loose. From this point on, keep the jars upright at all times.

Carefully wipe the outside of each jar with a slightly damp lint-free cloth, removing any fingerprints or other marks, and dry with another lint free cloth.

From this point on, handle the jars only by the lid, perhaps with a cloth between your fingers and the lid if your fingers are the least bit sticky or dirty.

Check the honey in with the clerk, and...wait for the decision of the judges!