

Preparing and Judging Soft Set and Naturally Granulated Honey

There is often a lot of confusion over these classes especially as some people refer to 'Creamed Honey' instead of 'Soft Set'.

Can we please get away from using the term 'Creamed Honey' as this implies that one is whipping up the honey causing a lot of air to be introduced. The worst thing someone can do is use a household mixer and beat the honey as though it were cream.

Soft set honey is obtained by seeding and can be known as the Dyce Method. If your honey is stored in buckets then it will probably have granulated which all good honey should do. I take a bucket of what could be a run honey and return it to liquid by placing it in the warming cabinet with the temperature set at 50°C. I also take a bucket of possibly oil seed rape honey and soften that but not returning to liquid. This is your seed honey. Use at least 10%, but more will not matter, of the seed. Once both honeys have cooled down then mix together in your settling tank stirring gently trying to introduce as little air as possible. Allow the honey to settle and any air to rise to the surface.

You are now ready to jar the honey. Have your jars washed and dry in the oven but do not use a T towel to dry the inside as it may leave very small flecks of material. I hold the neck of the jar at an angle and right up to the tap on the settling tank. Let the honey run down the inside of the jar gradually straightening the jar as it fills. It is a good idea to weigh the jar empty and again when filled to make sure you are not under or over filling. This is important. Immediately put the lid on preventing any air born particles landing on the surface of the honey. Make sure the jar is kept on a level surface while it is setting.

Oil seed rape honey is ideal as it granulates quickly with a smooth granulation. One can purchase a special tank for mixing the honey but this is expensive and only worth it if dealing in a lot of honey at any one time. A much cheaper option is a long handled spoon or paddle which can be purchased from beekeeping supplies.

What is the judge looking for? In a class specifically for 'Soft Set Honey' there should be a smooth, matt dry surface with no movement when the jar is tilted on its side. Using a tasting rod the honey will have the consistency of spreadable butter.

Naturally Granulated Honey is different. When extracting the honey, strain it at this stage and bottle allowing it to granulate naturally. Again oil seed rape is an ideal honey to use as it has a lovely smooth granulation.

When selecting jars for showing check the schedule to see exactly what is required. As there are a number of manufacturers of jars make sure that all the jars in your exhibit are the same make by checking the base of the jar. The judge is not in a position to weigh the jar empty and again full so the ruling for shows is there should be no air gap between the top of the honey and the bottom of the lid. This applies to jars with screw on lids. Jars with twist on lids are slightly different as the lid is shallow so the honey must be filled to a fill line near the neck. Best way is

to weigh empty and when filled. Lids are also important as many of the gold lacquered lids can be scratched or dented. There are gold plastic lids and some shows allow white plastic lids. Check the rules.

Honey will granulate at approx. 14°C and can be stored below 10°C.

Don't leave preparing your exhibits to the last minute. It takes about two weeks at least for your honey to set or granulate naturally.

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