

## How to prepare for the honey show: A guide for beginners and some pointers for previous entrants

If you are a new beekeeper or have never entered before perhaps this year is the ideal opportunity to enter.

As a new beekeeper or someone who hasn't entered the County Show before you can enter the Novice classes if you have not previously won a First Prize Award in a honey or wax class in the County Show or won the Foster Bequest Cup. Anyone who enters the novice classes is invited to attend the judging of these classes, this will be a very valuable experience to pick up hints and tips to improve your entries for future years.

The first place to start is to read the Schedule for the Country Honey Show – this will be available on the WBKA website. Read the Scheule carefully and decide which classes you want to enter. Entries can be made up to 9am on the morning of the show, but preferably in advance of this.

Here are some tips for preparing entries that fall in the Novice section – you only need one jar of Honey, so there's no excuse not to enter!! It is not a definitive guide, but I will highlight some of the common faults in preparation and presentation and try and give some tips on how to avoid them.



## Honey Classes

### Jars and Lids

Check the honey show schedule for the type of jar and lids to be used. The Warwickshire Beekeepers Association 2024 Honey Show stipulates standard clear glass 454g squat jars with plain gold-coloured screw lids. If you are entering any other shows check what their schedule requires. Jars should be clean without honey on the threads. The lids should be clean, undamaged and without honey on the inside – but the judges will make an allowance for some honey that may get onto the undersides of the lids due to transportation of your honey to the show. It's best to check jars and lids a few days before the show as the judge will want to smell your honey and the subtle aromas can be lost by a hurried change of lid just before entry.

### Filling and Labelling

Take care not to allow foreign matter, wax, bee parts or hairs to gain entry. In standard clear glass 454g squat jars with plain gold-coloured screw lids. To ensure a full 454g weight, no air gap should be visible below the lid when the jar is viewed from the side. You will be provided with Show labels, either in advance or on the day of show (depending on when you enter). You should affix these to your jar as advised in the schedule, the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association 2024 Honey Show requires this to be no less than 12mm and no more than 15mm from the bottom of the container to the lower edge of the label. It is useful to make yourself a guide, from a strip of card, sellotaped into a ring to help you do this.

### Liquid Honey

Classified as either light, medium, or dark in colour. The judge will grade colour against grading glasses that are available on the day so if you are not sure which class to enter ask someone to help then your jar can be checked against these standards. Look at honey for clarity. Ideally you should have a bright crystal-clear honey. Excess pollen at extraction may lead to cloudiness. Check your jar of honey with a torch to look for fine bubbles, this can sometime be cleared by careful heating but we sure not to overheat or do this too close to the show (so the honey is still warm). Minute particles of debris can be extracted with a fine straw. Skim from the surface any excess of bubbles or froth.

#### Crystallised or Soft Set Honey.

Honey needs to be sufficiently well set so that it does not fall out if the jar is inverted! Debris in set honey usually falls to the bottom and is easily seen at the base of the jar. The surface should be clean of froth, excessive bubbles and debris. Frosting, although a natural phenomenon, is unsightly and may well detract from an otherwise good honey. It occurs as the honey contracts during setting and is usually seen around the neck of the jar, particularly in naturally granulated honeys. Some judges do not regard it as a fault. It can be avoided to some extent by using jars that have been slightly warmed. When Crystallised or Soft Set Honey a judge will also assess the texture of the granulation so if possible, always seed your set honey with a fine-grained honey such as oilseed rape.



#### Frame for extraction or for cut comb

Needs to be shown in a special box with glass sides, ask if anyone at your branch has one you can borrow. Pick your best frame as you extract and put it carefully to one side. The frame itself should be cleaned of wax and debris. The honey itself should be liquid and there should be no pollen present, use a touch to check this. Wax moth should be avoided.



### **Cake of Beeswax**

A 150g (minimum weight) block of beeswax is required for the relevant class of the Warwickshire Beekeepers Association 2023 Honey Show. You should start off with your best wax capping that are not too dark.

Put these into a double saucepan over water (**never** heat wax directly) and melt the wax very slowly. Do not overheat the wax, beeswax melts at around 62-62 °C. Too high a temperature will darken the colour. The melted wax will need to be filtered through lint several times. Most people use a Pyrex bowl as a mould which should be polished with a small amount of washing liquid or a releasing spray. Pour the measured amount into the container through a sieve and lint. Allow to cool slowly overnight in a previously warmed oven. Tap or float the cake out in the morning. Wrap the wax cake in polythene bag until the show. This is only a very brief description of how to make a cake of beeswax, you should research the method that suits you and take the highest care as wax is high inflammable. Do not leave your melting wax unattended.

Once you have your exhibit prepared, unless the schedule says it is permitted, you should not exhibit your wax block in your own display case or box.

### **Six Jars of Honey for public sale**

This is a very popular class to enter, it very often attracts a lot of entries and quite often the best in show 'Blue Ribbon' is awarded to the winner of this class.

Some pointers for this class:

-Make sure you use the correct size jar as directed by the show schedule, and also ensure that the specified type of lid is used.

- All six jars are to have labels attached for public sale that must comply with the current relevant trading regulations. As per the schedule for the County Honey show you do not need to apply security (anti-tamper labels) and you do not have to include a lot number.

- Is it fine for your name to be included on the label if that is included on the labels you use for selling your honey.



If this has interested you in entering the County Honey show you can check the schedule for any of the other classes you may want to enter, you are not just restricted to entering the Novice classes. The Cake and Photography classes are partially easy to enter.

Best of Luck!!



