10 Facts About Honey

Most People Don't Know

Humans have treasured honey for at least 9,000 years — longer than written language. Here's what most of us still don't know about the only food made by an insect that we also eat.

01

It never spoils — ever.

Archaeologists found 3,000-year-old honey in Egyptian tombs — still perfectly edible. Honey's low moisture and natural acidity (pH 3–4.5) make it impossible for bacteria to survive. Sealed and dry, it keeps indefinitely.

02

One bee makes 1/12 teaspoon in her lifetime.

Twelve bees working their entire lives produce a single teaspoon. One pound of honey requires 55,000 miles of flying — twice around the Earth — and visits to roughly two million flowers.

03

There are over 300 distinct flavors.

Honey's taste depends entirely on which flowers the bees visited. Clover is mild and floral; buckwheat is dark and malty; manuka is earthy and medicinal. Like wine, it varies by region, season, and bloom.

04

Darker honey has more antioxidants.

Color is a reliable guide to nutritional density. The darker the honey, the higher its antioxidant and mineral content. Buckwheat honey has antioxidant levels comparable to some berries.

05

It has been used as currency.

Romans paid taxes in honey instead of gold. In 11th-century Germany, peasants paid their lords in honey and beeswax. As a sweetener, preservative, medicine, and fermentation ingredient, it was one of the original universal commodities.

06

Crystallized honey is not spoiled.

Crystallization is a natural process — actually a sign of raw, unprocessed honey. To reliquefy, place the jar in warm (not boiling) water for a few minutes. Commercial honey is heat-treated specifically to delay this.

07

It works against antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Manuka honey is clinically effective against MRSA — methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, one of the hardest hospital infections to treat. Medical-grade honey is now used in wound dressings worldwide.

08

Bees fan it into existence.

Flower nectar contains up to 80% water. Bees add enzymes and fan it vigorously with their wings to evaporate moisture down to 17–20%. Without this process, it would ferment rather than preserve.

09

Ancient Egyptians used it as a beauty treatment.

Egyptian women applied honey mixed with milk to skin as a moisturizer and wound treatment. Honey is a natural humectant — it draws and holds moisture — and still appears in modern shampoos, lip balms, and face masks.

10

Only 7 of 20,000 bee species actually produce honey.

Of the roughly 20,000 known bee species on Earth, only a handful in the genus *Apis* produce honey in harvestable quantities. Stingless bees in tropical regions also make a thinner, more tart version prized in traditional medicine. The honeybee — the one we know best — is a remarkable exception, not the rule.

DID YOU KNOW?

A single hive contains 20,000–80,000 bees in summer. The queen can lay up to 2,000 eggs per day.

Worker bees are all female. Male bees (drones) have one purpose: mating with a new queen.

Bees communicate the location of flowers through the *waggle dance* — a figure-eight

TRY THIS AT HOME

- Taste three honeys side by side — clover, wildflower, buckwheat
- Plant a pollinator garden with native flowering plants
- Watch a hive inspection video — the calm is remarkable
- Try raw local honey on a wound or a sore throat

WHY BEES MATTER

One in every three bites of food we eat depends on pollinators. Bees pollinate over $15 billion worth of crops in the U.S. annually.

Colony Collapse Disorder has reduced managed honeybee colonies by more than 50% since the 1940s. Habitat loss, pesticides, and pathogens are primary causes.

movement that encodes direction and distance.

▶ Read: *What's It Like to Keep Bees?* at thegreenlifeproject.com

Planting natives, reducing pesticide use, and supporting local beekeepers all help.