

Varietal Honey

Did you know that there are over 300 types of honey in the USA alone? Varietal honey, also known as monofloral honey, is honey made primarily from the nectar of a single type of flower. The color, taste, texture, and aromas of honey change depending on the nectar of flowers visited by the bees that made it. Each varietal honey is unique, but what makes a varietal honey? What are some important varieties?

The honey making process is still the same regardless of the variety. The one thing that changes in each different type of honey is the nectar source. The nectar source depends upon two things, what is currently in bloom, and where the hive is located. To capture and preserve the qualities and flavors unique to monofloral honeys, beekeepers must think about when plants are flowering, where to locate the hives and when to time the honey harvest. Because of the flower sources from which honey comes from, no two honeys are exactly alike in flavor or nutritional content.

One unique varietal is known as mad honey. Mad honey is made from the nectar of various rhododendron species which have grayanotoxins. This is a neurotoxin that can cause light headedness, euphoria, nausea, and high doses can cause hallucinations. This “maddening” honey was even historically used to deliberately poison Pompey's army by King Mithridates. In modern day Turkey, this honey is used as a recreational drug and in traditional medicine.

Clover honey is a more common varietal and is easier to get at grocery stores. There are hundreds of types of clover, so it is one of the more readily available honeys. It is a lighter honey with a mild sweet flavor, so it is often used to replace sugar. There are even studies that have been done on diabetic wounds using clover honey that have shown that it has great healing and antibacterial properties.

An important and highly sought after varietal is Centauri honey. Centauri honey is produced in Turkey and is officially the most expensive honey in the world at the price of \$10,800 per kilogram which earned it a spot in the Guinness World Records for being the priciest honey in the world. Centauri honey is celebrated for anti-cancer and immune-boosting benefits that some say makes it no surprise that this is the world's most costly honey.

Orange blossom honey is one of the few honey varieties that taste like its nectar source. Orange blossom honey is sweet with a subtle orange flavor. It does sometimes have other citrus tree nectar in it, but to be orange blossom honey it must come from mostly orange trees, otherwise it must be called citrus blossom honey.

For varieties such as manuka to be confirmed authentic they must have their honey tested by independent third parties. The test results should be noted on the label of these honeys. These tests usually check for specific chemical markers which are unique to the specific honey. Understanding honey grading systems can be extremely helpful when figuring out if your honey is fake or not. All honey grading systems measure the concentration of bioactive compounds in the honey, which give an idea of their authenticity. How will you know if your honey is fake? According to the FDA as well as the food safety divisions of the World Health Organization and the European Commission for honey to be considered authentic there must be pollen, without pollen honey is not thought to be authentic. Always read the labels, if your honey has ingredients added such as high fructose corn syrup or has added sugars, then it is not real honey. Many of the honeys that are sold in grocery stores are unfortunately not real honey.

There are also many health benefits from the different honey varieties. Alfalfa honey is great for soothing sore throats and reducing coughing, it can also be used to alleviate some stomach ulcers. Buckwheat honey can be used to reduce cholesterol and it can also be used to stop DNA mutations. Wildflower honey is said to help improve your memory and help treat respiratory infections. Acacia honey may treat and prevent acne, it can also be used to make wounds heal faster. Fireweed honey can help fight off infections and it can also reduce the duration of diarrhea. It is fascinating how honey made from different nectar sources can provide so many different health benefits.

There are so many different varieties of honey, and it is amazing how they all have their own unique properties. They may be different in many ways including taste, texture, and smell, but they all provide some great health benefits. Some honey varieties are rarer and more important such as Centaury honey, but there are also the more common honey varieties such as clover honey. There is one way all these many kinds of honey are all the same though, they all take the hard work of thousands of remarkably busy bees.

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