

CBKA Honey Show

Guidelines for entrants



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What's this guide for?

At the 2014 CBKA Honey Show, a number of people mentioned that they'd like some guidelines on how to prepare their honey for show, and some information on what the judges were looking for. To that end, we've prepared this guide. It's not exhaustive – different judges have slightly different things they look for – but it'll help you prepare a good entry for show.

General tips

- The most important thing to do is to enter the show. Although some of the classes require a considerable amount of effort, and only a few people enter them, there are some classes which need much less work. In particular, it's really easy to enter **Class F1** – that's where the honey's judged on flavour and aroma alone (you don't even need to filter it). If you've got at least one jar of honey this year, enter it in Class F1!
- Some classes have fewer entries than others. It's easier to win a prize in a class with only a few entries than in a class with lots of entries! In particular, classes A, B, C, F1, R1, R2 and V, plus the cookery classes, have a decent number of entries every year. That's not to say don't enter them – just that if you're after prizes, have a look at some of the other classes.
- If you've never won a First Prize in any class at a honey show before, enter the Novice class (class V). Judges take particular care to give feedback on each novice entry.
- Make sure you read the class specification (and recipe, for the confectionery classes). In previous years, some otherwise excellent exhibits have been disqualified for not being of the correct weight, or being made in the wrong size or shape tin.
- If you're wanting to enter classes A, B or C, but you're not sure if your honey's medium or dark, put it in anyway. The judge will move your honey to the correct class if it's too light or too dark.
- The judging takes place on the Saturday morning of the Honey Show. If you want to learn more about what's good in a particular class, watch the judge when she's judging it – she'll happily answer questions. (Just make sure you don't give away that you've entered the class, or which jars are yours.)
- Do ask the Show Secretary, course tutors, experienced beekeepers, people who've won prizes before, etc., for their advice if you're not sure about an entry – it's better to get advice before the show than from the judge!
- If you're not sure if what you've got is good enough, put it in anyway. The judge may well write comments on your entry card to help you improve next year.

What's the judging process?

First of all, the judge will look at the jars to check that they're matched, full (no daylight visible under the lid) and in the right class. Matched jars mean that they need to be the same type of jar, with the same type of lid. The lids all need to be the same colour – look at them in daylight, rather than under your kitchen light, as they may look different! (Note that jars have mould marks on the bottom, which are usually a number; it doesn't matter if those numbers are different.)

Next, she'll look at the honey itself – it should be crystal clear (for liquid honey) or evenly set with no silvering (for set honey). There shouldn't be any bits in it – dust, bee legs, etc. – and no tiny bubbles on the inside at the bottom of the jar. (She'll put the jar on a large torch, shining up through the honey, to make it easier to see.) To help with this, filter your honey through the finest filter you have (a fresh pair of fine tights does well for this). It also helps to warm your honey before filtering, and to warm the jars a little, too, before filling them.

Then, she'll open one jar and inspect the surface. There shouldn't be any bubbles on the surface or where the honey meets the glass. To get rid of these before the show, use a teaspoon to skim off any bubbles.

Next, she'll smell the honey, to sample its aroma. To help get a good aroma it's important not to open your jars for a couple of days before the show.

Finally, she'll taste the honey. It should have a good, clean, floral taste, with no aftertaste or unpleasant flavours.

Before awarding any prizes, a judge will also check all other jars in the entry to make sure they're all conforming to the above advice.

Special types of jarred honey

- Creamed honey should be soft, yet not pourable, with no bubbles on the surface. There should be no discernible crystallisation. The colour should be even.
- Set honey should be naturally set. Smaller crystals are preferred by the judges, but it's not essential. The top should be free of bubbles, as should the point where the honey meets the jar; the colour should be even.
- Chunk honey (liquid honey with comb in) should have the liquid honey crystal clear as in the advice above. All cells of the comb should be full, with the same honey that surrounds them; there should be no uncapped cells, pollen or air bubbles in the comb. The piece of comb should fill the jar in which it's placed, and the cells on the side should slope upwards.

The Gift Class (T)

Note that honey entered in this class is a gift from you to the association, who can sell it for their funds. Honey should be presented as for the other classes – it's not intended that honey is presented in the form of a gift that you'd give for a birthday, for example.

Sections

Sections for show should be clean, free of propolis, and identical. The cells should all be full of liquid honey and capped.

Cut comb

Cut comb honey is straightforward to prepare but requires a little care. First, cut your comb into neat rectangles with a very sharp knife, then place them on a wire rack to drain. When they've fully drained – which can take a day or so – then place them in plastic boxes. Cut comb honey should have no honey surrounding it. The comb should be even, and the honey should be perfectly liquid throughout, with no pollen in the cells.

Whole frames

Frames should be even, and have as few unfilled cells as possible. Any unfilled cells should be around the edges, not in the middle. All cells containing honey should be capped. The frame should be displayed in a show case; ask the Secretary if you need one.

Frames of set honey should be fully set with no liquid honey left. It's better if the frame is unwired, because it's easier to melt out, but it doesn't matter if there are wires in it.

Frames of liquid honey should be on wired foundation. The cells should be full of liquid honey with no granulation; there should also be no pollen in the cells. (The judge will check this by shining a torch through the comb.)

When you take a good frame of honey off your hive, it's possible it might have wax moth or braula in it. To guard against an errant pest ruining your frame of honey, put it in the freezer for 24 hours, being careful not to damage any of the capping.

Photographs

It's good if any pictures are in focus, decently lit (not too dark in the dark parts, nor light in the light parts), and well composed. (Crop the picture if need be, to make it more interesting or take out bits which don't add to the image.) If you're taking macro pictures, try to make sure that the bee's eyes are in focus.

Confectionery classes

The most important thing with the confectionery classes, apart from making sure that whatever you've made tastes nice and looks good, is to follow the recipe and directions clearly. If the recipe indicates an 8" round tin, entries made in a 7" or 9" tin will be disqualified. Likewise, if the recipe indicates to place spoonfuls of mixture on a tray, you shouldn't pipe the mixture. Chocolate chips are bought in a packet; chocolate chunks are carved off a block.

For classes DD, EE and FF, it's important that the entries have a good *honey* flavour. Honey needs to be a key ingredient of the recipe and tastable in its finished form, rather than just a small part of the recipe.

Beeswax

All wax should be bright in colour, with a good smell – generally, the lighter the colour, the finer the wax. Some people use bleaching agents but it's a fiddle and generally frowned upon.

If the class is for several identical items (eg wax cakes, candles etc.) they should all match in appearance (and weight, for cakes).

Wax cakes should have no bubbles in them anywhere. Do check weights; in the 2014 honey show an otherwise winning entry was disqualified for not being heavy enough!

Candles should be evenly made, with an appropriately sized wick centrally placed in the candle. If your candle burns leaving a shell of wax around the edge, the wick's too small; if the flame's not very big or goes out then you might be using too big a wick. Dip the finished end of the wick in some wax, just once for a few seconds, to impregnate it with wax; this'll make it easier for the judge to light.

The judge will light the candle and note how it burns, for at least five minutes. There should be a nice even burn, with no sputtering due to impurities in the candle. She'll then blow the candle out and note how long it takes to stop smouldering. After a while she'll light it again, to check how it relights.

Mead and other drinks

Drinks should be crystal clear, with no sediment, impurities, gelatinous blobs, etc., and presented in a 750ml bottle with a punt (dimple) in the end, along with a cork stopper with a plastic top. (You can buy these from Cutlacks or numerous other homebrew suppliers.) The flavour should be clean and honeyed, with any extra ingredients pleasant and not overwhelming. (Take care with cloves, in particular!) It should have a good aroma and aftertaste.

Good luck!