



Harvesting Honey in Arizona

Anne Lesenne

For new beekeepers starting out, the investment in an extractor can be over your budget. For this reason, it is a great idea to be a member of your local Beekeeper club where they often let members borrow the club extractor. You can also find other beekeepers that live close to you that will allow you to come borrow their extracting equipment. Good extractors can make quick work out of the harvesting task. If you are going to harvest several times a year to produce specialty monofloral honeys, you should consider purchasing your own extractor and setting up a honey kitchen.

You have the option to harvest honey the old-fashioned way, by crushing the comb and filtering the wax out. Since honey is very thick this can take quite a while to complete the harvest. This method of harvesting also destroys the



Old wax in filter bag.



Wax in homemade solar wax melter.

comb, which takes a lot of floral resources to produce, but you'll get nice, beautiful beeswax to sell as well. If crushing honeycomb is the method you are going to use, you should place new frames in the honey supers with no foundation. You also have the option of producing comb honey, which is chunks of honeycomb with the capped honey left intact and placed into a jar or plastic container for sale. Comb honey is readily available in Europe but is more of a special treat here in the United States, so you can charge more per pound for this type of honey product. There are also specialized frames that offer round spaces for the bees to build their wax and fill it with honey called Ross Rounds. The suppliers of these special frames will also be able to supply you with the containers and lids that fit the rounds.

If using an extractor there are still several options available. Since most new beekeepers start out with just a few hives, you can also start out with a small extractor that will process



Comb honey in packages.

a few frames at a time. The smallest I would start with would be a 6 to 9 frame extractor. These are designed to fit medium frames, but they may also fit fewer deep frames. They work by centrifugal force as you spin the frames, the honey will be flung to the sides of the extractor and run down to the bottom. They have a valve attached at the bottom that you close during spinning, then open to pour the honey through a wire mesh strainer into a honey bucket. You can choose a hand crank or motorized extractor according to your budget and your physical ability to turn the hand crank as well as how often you are going to extract during a year. The more often you plan on extracting, the more you will want to consider a motorized extractor. The frames will need to be spun for a few minutes on one side then reversed in the tank to spin the other side. You will also need a capping knife and capping container. The capping knife is to slice the caps off the sealed honey so the honey can flow out when spun in the extractor. The capping container (bucket or tank) catches the cut off cappings for later processing and holds the frames until they can be placed in the extractor. Once you have spun most of the honey out of the frames, you can return them to a hive for cleaning. The bees will only take a day or two to totally clean up every last drop of honey left in the frames. Then the frames are ready for cold storage or your next crop of honey. If you don't want wax moths, small



Honey frames in extractor.

hive beetle, rodents, or other insects to destroy your honey frames, they should be stored in a freezer.

Once you've processed all your honey through the wire mesh strainer into the honey buckets, it should be clear and ready for bottling. The bottling process goes much faster if the honey is warm. They sell bottling tanks that warm the honey and allow you to dispense honey from a valve at the rate that works well for your containers. You can also get warming belts for honey buckets that will allow you to fill your containers directly from the buckets.

If you have the space and want to extract often you may want to build a honey kitchen. This space should be easily accessible by vehicle to bring in heavy honey supers. The kitchen should be well lit, have hot and cold running water or at least a hose and water source to wash everything down, electricity for machines, washable floor, ceiling and walls, and a drain. The first area would be for capping the frames, the area next to that should be the extractor, followed by a dust free area to bottle the honey. You could also add a hot room (80° to 90°F) to warm the frames before extraction or to finish drying the honey that was uncapped and not fully cured. The kitchen could be shared between several beekeepers, but should be thoroughly cleaned between each. All metal equipment should be stainless steel, and plastics should be food grade.



Honey coming out of extractor to be filtered through sieves.



Two types of honey.

While filling the containers with honey, some air bubbles will get mixed in and cloud the clarity of your honey. Not to worry! Allow the bottled honey to sit for at least 24 hours and all the bubbles should rise to the top. Honey containers are available in all shapes and sizes and are usually made from plastic or glass. Plastic will be lighter and cheaper, but glass will not add any flavors to the honey while it is stored. Clear containers are usually chosen because they show off the color of the honey, which varies with the flower source it came from. Your honey should also be labeled according to State requirements of the Cottage Food Products laws which have new requirements as of July 1, 2019.

'Cottage Food Production Operations must label all of their food products properly, which includes specified information on the label of each unit of home baked good or Confectionery item when it is offered for sale:

- *The name and registration number of the food preparer (Registration numbers began July 1, 2019, Home address is no longer required on the label.)*
- *A list of all the ingredients in the product*
- *The product's production date*
- *The following statement: "This product was produced in a home kitchen that may process common food allergens and is not subject to public health inspection."*
- *If applicable, a statement that the product was made in a facility for individuals with developmental disabilities.*

More detailed Arizona Label requirements and a downloadable label format to customize can be found at the links at the end of this document. Depending on the size of your business, your label must comply with Federal label regulations and with the new nutritional labeling law.'

You can download a copy of the guide by following the link at the end of this document.

References

The Backyard Beekeeper: An Absolute Beginner's Guide to Keeping Bees in Your Yard and Garden (4th Edition) by Kim Flottum

The Beekeeper's Handbook (4th Edition) by Diana Sammataro and Alphonso Avitabile

The Complete Bee Handbook by Dewey Caron

<https://www.pickyourown.org/CottageFoodLaws-Arizona.php>

<https://www.pickyourown.org/cottagefood/FDA-Food-Labeling-Guide-Most-Recent.pdf>



AUTHORS

ANNE LESENNE
Assistant Agent, Horticulture

CONTACT

ANNE LESENNE
annelesenne@email.arizona.edu

This information has been reviewed
by University faculty.
extension.arizona.edu/pubs/az2017-2022.pdf

Other titles from Arizona Cooperative Extension
can be found at:
extension.arizona.edu/pubs

Any products, services or organizations that are mentioned, shown or indirectly implied in this publication do not imply endorsement by The University of Arizona. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Edward C. Martin, Interim Director, Extension, Division of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information in its programs and activities.