



Sprout

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The sweetness of Spring—bliss for bees

Step out into the sunshine

• Honey—Malfroy's pure liquid gold

• What's in season now

PLUS: Love food, hate waste? Try composting



Honey

honey

Sprout | Feature

by Diane Jardine

A second-generation beekeeper, Tim Malfroy is a creator of liquid gold – honey that is. Sold under the appropriate name, Malfroy's Gold, Tim specialises in producing premium and rare varieties of Australian honey. Referred to as varietal, single-origin or mono-floral honey, Tim is what is described as an artisan honey producer.

Tim and his father are migratory apiarists, moving their hives around the state as the trees bloom. 'My father began beekeeping in the 70s. He is mostly self-taught and has learned the art of apiculture from hands-on experience, and I'm learning the same way – by letting the bees teach me,' Tim says.

'As migratory beekeepers, we help the bees find the best nectar by moving the hives from time to time into areas where there is a good source of nectar and pollen.'

The skill in producing good honey, however, is not just in looking after the bees: 'You have to be a decent amateur botanist as well as a beekeeper,' Tim says. 'Each type of tree produces varying amounts of nectar and pollen, in varying flavour and density, so knowing which are the best honey trees is very important.'

The hives are moved about four times a year, not necessarily seasonally, but based around the flowering of trees in the region. 'We use lots of different bee sites in the Blue Mountains, Central Tablelands and Central West of New South Wales. You really need to have a good understanding of the country and the trees in the region and when they flower – some flower every 2 or 3 years, some only every 4 or 8 years – depending on their budding cycle and the weather patterns.'

The hives are moved at night to make sure all the bees are inside and have returned from their daytime nectar gathering. The hives are then relocated by the next morning when the bees head out to explore.

Honeybees need nectar, pollen and water to feed the hive and make their honey. They can travel up to 10 kilometres looking for these things, from sunrise to sunset. The nectar is carried in a special honey stomach, while the pollen is carried in separate pollen baskets on the hind legs. Busy bees have great stamina and carry big weights.

'Our aim is to help the bees do what they do naturally, and to harvest the honey with minimal processing and I pay special attention to the unique characteristics of each honey variety as we harvest it. Then I select the finest honey to be bottled under the Malfroy's Gold label.'





I think consumers are tired of blended supermarket honey and want to try something with real flavour, health benefits, and a sense of place,' says Tim.

Getting the honey from hive to jar takes a lot of hard work, but is essentially quite a simple process, Tim explains. 'Honey is perfect in its natural state, so we don't overheat, blend, or filter it. We want our honey to reflect what the bees have captured as closely as possible. When the frames are full of ripened honey, we take them back to the extracting plant where the honey is spun out of the frames. The honey is settled and bottled and the beeswax is melted down and made into beeswax candles. The frames are returned to the hive, where the bees continue the process anew. It's an incredibly sustainable process, creating no waste and using only what nature provides.

'Australian honey is unique and highly sought after around the world. This is due to our unique melliferous flora, and the purity and quality of the honey. The majority of honey produced in Australia is from the hundreds of Eucalypt species, but other native trees and shrubs such as tea-tree, banksias and grevillea also contribute.

'At the moment we have Pure Red Stringybark, *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*, which is produced in the higher areas of the Central Tablelands around Bathurst.' Tim describes it as a sweet, rich honey with smoky, earthy tones. 'It has a great combination of body and flavour and it's one of my favourites.'

The Pure Yellow Box, *Eucalyptus melliodora*, honey is also from the Central Tablelands and tends to occur in grassy, pastoral areas. It is often regarded as one of the finest Australian honeys. It has a bright, hay yellow colour and a floral, sweet flavour.

'We also sell raw honeycomb,' Tim says. 'It's cut straight from the hive and packaged in pieces that can be eaten whole, broken over yoghurt with fruit, or used as a interesting addition to cheese platters or desserts. It's our most popular product.'

Their commitment to quality seems to be paying off, with Malfroy's Gold picking up Champion Exhibit at the Sydney Royal National Honey Show this year, and many of Australia's leading chefs starting to feature their products on menus across the country.

Tim's honey handling tips

Honey is a remarkable substance as it never spoils. Three-thousand-year-old honey discovered in Egyptian tombs has been found to be entirely edible!

Throughout the history of mankind, honey has held an incredibly important place in society for religious, medicinal, gastronomic and ceremonial purposes.

Raw honey and honeycomb are rich in antioxidants, minerals, vitamins and aromas, and contain more than 200 natural substances, some of which do not occur elsewhere. Each variety of honey has unique properties and can enhance energy, soothe digestion, aid sleep, heal wounds, cure sore throats and colds, and provide relief from hay fever.

Some honeys over time will crystallise or go 'candy'. Candied honey can be liquefied by sitting the jar in warm to hot water for a few minutes – it is not a sign that the honey has gone off, Tim explains. Some pure honeys will take 4 or 5 years to crystallise naturally, whereas others will crystallise within a week. It all has to do with the naturally occurring sugars in the honey.

Each varietal honey also has a different GI rating. Pure Yellow Box and Pure Red Stringybark have the two lowest GI ratings of any tested Australian honey, at 35 and 44 respectively (white sugar is rated at 60 to 65). Low GI foods are more slowly digested and hence are better for energy levels and appetite control.

When selecting a honey look for a flavour profile on the jar. Generally, the darker the colour the stronger the flavour, although this is not always the case. Some honeys have bitter, spicy notes, whereas others have soft and rounded flavours. Try to buy direct off a beekeeper so you can ask them about the flavour and where and how it has been produced.

BEE FACTS

Australia is said to have the smallest bee in the world – the 1.8 millimetre *Quasihesma* bee.

The largest bee in the world is the female *Megachile pluto* bee found in Indonesia – it is 39 millimetres in length and has a wingspan of 63 millimetres. Buzz.



Colony collapse disorder

Bees aren't just important for supplying honey for your toast in the morning. Around 65 per cent of Australia's crops rely on bees for their pollination. Indeed, apples, cherries, peas and almonds, rely almost totally on bees for their pollination, and hence fertilisation and the development of seeds.

The importance of bees to agriculture has resulted in the development of the Pollination Program, a research and development strategy to ensure the security of the Australian bee population to in turn ensure the future of our crops for strong crop yields and harvest quality.

The program has also been kickstarted by reports that more than one third of bee colonies in the US have disappeared since 2006. Similar loss of bees has been reported across Europe and in the UK, although less severe. Australia's bee colonies are so far not affected and are being exported overseas to boost international stocks of bees.

Dubbed Colony Collapse Disorder, scientists are not sure why this phenomenon has occurred. Potential causes range from mites and viral and bacterial infections, to pesticides and the impact of farming methods on crops.

Industry leaders have described the situation as more critical than mad cow disease. The Director of The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has warned: 'Bees contribute to global food security and their extinction would represent a terrible biological disaster.'

Attracting bees to your garden

Australia has more than 1,500 species of native bees. A healthy population of bees in your garden means ample cross-pollination of plans and healthy, strong crops.

To attract bees to your garden, have a selection of the following plants, they provide good nectar for bees:

- grevilleas
- bottlebrush
- Christmas bush
- eucalyptus
- lavender
- roses
- daisies





Macadamia meringues with Malfroy's eucalypt flower honey ice-cream and honeycomb

Serves 8

Meringues seem simple and they are, but take note of the weather and your utensils – meringues don't like the damp or humidity. I know this because my Mum used to curse when I asked her to make me the *Women's Weekly* Cake of Kisses as a little girl – we lived in very humid Papua New Guinea.

- eggwhites of 2 eggs, room temperature (this is important for meringues)
- ½ cup caster sugar
- ¼ teaspoon pure vanilla
- ½ cup of roasted macadamia nuts

Meringue

Preheat fan-forced oven to 140° Celcius (slightly more for a regular oven).

Line a baking tray with baking paper.

Make sure your whisk and bowl are perfectly clean, free of grease and dry. Separate eggwhites from yolks.

Note: Keep your yolks for the ice-cream. Otherwise, these can be frozen and used as you need – make sure you mark in pen on the container how many yolks there are.

Beat eggwhites until stiff peaks form, then add sugar, a little at a time, still beating. Beat in vanilla and fold in macadamias.

Place small teaspoons of the mixture on the baking tray. The easiest way to do this is to take a tablespoon of the mixture, and use a teaspoon and slide the correct amount off the tablespoon onto the tray.

Place the tray in the oven. Bake for 45 minutes. Turn the oven off and leave door slightly ajar to allow the meringues to cool completely in the oven before you remove them.

Ice-cream

In a small saucepan, add the milk, vanilla bean and 2 cups of the cream and bring to the boil.

In a medium bowl, whisk the egg yolks, sugar and honey together. Add the milk and cream mix.

Put the mixture back into the saucepan on the stove on medium and cook, stirring continuously, until it is 83° Celcius (use a thermometer) or coats the back of a wooden spoon. Heat slowly so you don't overheat or burn it.

Have ready beside the stove a large bowl with ice in it and a second bowl inside it to chill. Place a strainer over the bowl. When it's ready, quickly pour the custard through the strainer into the chilled bowl and allow to cool. When cool, add the extra cup of cream and mix.

When nearly frozen, add honey and pour into machine to process the mixture in your ice-cream maker according to the manufacturer's instructions. Once the ice-cream has reached soft serve consistency, pour into a freezable container and freeze for a couple of hours. Take it out and whip it with an electric mixer or immersion blender, or furiously by hand. Freeze it again, whip it again four or five times.

- 1 cup organic milk
- 1 vanilla bean
- 3 cups cream
- 6 egg yolks (you have some 2 already from the meringue recipe)
- 180g caster sugar
- 1 tablespoon Australian eucalypt flower honey

Note: You will need an ice-cream maker for this recipe, or you can do without, however, it is worth the small investment. I am into sharing and borrowing. I often buy things between friends so that I cut down on the number of consumables and ensure I can afford the quality. These are the principles I think help overall.

One of the runniest and funniest food events I did was with Slow Food. We organised to show a film called *The Real Dirt on Farmer John* and cooked up a dish sourced from the Hawkesbury region. The dessert was poached nectarines with honeycomb and some local cream. We served the honeycomb straight off the frame and, 200 people later, I was stuck to the spoon! No-one seemed to notice and everyone loved the dessert.