

The Honey Bees' Contribution

By
Sherry Dell, PhD, CN
Certified Nutritionist

Have you heard the news reports about the plight of the honey bee? Speculation is that up to 80% of some beekeepers colonies have been lost to a condition that has come to be called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Significant numbers of the wild bee population have also died out along with a similar sized reduction in wildflower numbers, which require their pollination. Happily, organic beekeepers and those beekeepers that use natural sized cells (some beekeeping practices include using larger cells in the attempt to produce larger bees and more honey) have reported little loss in colony size. And asking individual beekeepers as I travel (the Western United States and France), I've been happy to learn of no reports of problems with their hives.

Perhaps the problems with CCD are limited to certain areas or are just cyclical in nature. In any case, maybe because I come from a long line of farmers and bee keepers, the news of the honey bee plight was very disturbing to me. It was Einstein who is quoted as saying "If honey bees become extinct, human society will follow in four years." But every farmer knows that if the alfalfa isn't pollinated, the cattle aren't fed, and the milk (and the beef) is not produced. Crops such as apples, pears, tangerines, peaches, soybeans, pumpkins, squash, cucumbers, cherries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, carrots, broccoli, almonds, and avocados all require bee pollination. Come to think of it, all nutritionists should be disturbed by this news.

In addition to their huge contribution to life on this planet as pollinators, honey bees also produce a number of amazing products. In addition to honey, they make or are involved in the collection of pollen, propolis, royal jelly, beeswax, and honeycomb.

Aside from babies under one year of age who are advised not to ingest honey because of the fear of infant botulism, honey in particular is a good addition to your home medicine kit. Long used as a natural antibacterial salve, honey can be spread lightly over a clean wound to prevent infection and to promote healing. It also has anti-inflammatory properties. Medical doctors have begun to use honey to help wound healing where cancer has broken through the skin. Currently honey is even being developed into a medical product as a kind of high-tech honey dressing that is easy to use in hospital settings.

Pollen collected by bees is helpful to many people reducing the symptoms of prostatitis and benign prostatic hyperplasia. Propolis is a resinous substance that bees collect from trees. It has antimicrobial properties that have been shown useful in protecting children from parasites of the gastrointestinal tract as well as in promoting wound healing and much more. Royal jelly is secreted from the glands of the worker bees and is used within the hive to feed the queen bee and the bee larvae in its first days. Seen to promote long life and fertility in the queen bee, it has been used therapeutically to help lower cholesterol levels, to treat diabetes, to balance hormones, and in general to reduce the effects of aging. Beeswax is also a bee secretion which they use to create the honey combs of the bee hive. Its uses for humans is long: candles, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, salves and much more. Click [here](#) to see the recipe for Sherry's Plantain Salve which uses beeswax as one of its ingredients. And finally, honeycomb is the actual hive, made of beeswax and used to house young bees and to store honey and pollen. A small piece of honeycomb is a grand treat that when chewed, turns into a kind of sweet gum-like substance (not for swallowing).

Take some time to read a bit more about the honey bees. All of the products mentioned above are created from a mind-boggling level of work from the bees. For example, it is estimated that bees must fly 150,000

miles to produce one pound of beeswax. We humans are interconnected with and reliant on the hard-working honeybees to an extreme degree. Their contribution to our lives must never be underestimated.

Let me leave you with some wonderful recipes for using honey. And please--think kindly of the honeybee when you use them.

Honey Hair Conditioner

½ cup honey
¼ cup cold pressed olive oil
4 drops essential oil (lavender or rosemary are my favorites)
1 tsp xanthum gum

Place all ingredients in a small bowl and mix well. Wet hair and massage this mixture into hair thoroughly. Cover hair with a warm towel or shower cap or saran wrap. Leave on for 30 minutes. Shampoo hair and rinse with cool water.

Honey Cornbread

1 cup each yellow cornmeal and any whole grain or mixed grain flour
2 tsp baking powder
1 tsp baking soda
1 tsp sea salt
1 cup rice milk
¼ cup honey
1 egg
1 tbsp safflower oil

Combine cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in large bowl. In small bowl, whisk together rice milk, honey, egg, and oil. Add to flour mixture. Stir lightly until just barely combined. Pour batter into a well-greased 8x8 inch baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes or until toothpick inserted near center comes out clean. Makes 9 servings.

Vegetables in Honey Peanut Sauce

½ cup honey
¼ cup peanut butter
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp fresh chopped cilantro
1/8 tsp crushed red pepper flakes
4 cups EACH broccoli, sliced carrots, snow peas

Combine honey, peanut butter, soy sauce, cilantro and red pepper flakes in small bowl and set aside. Steam vegetables to crisp-tender, drain. In large bowl toss steamed vegetables with honey peanut sauce. Good served over rice.