

4.6: Honey

Honey is a natural food, essentially an invert sugar. Bees gather nectar and, through the enzyme invertase, change it into honey. Honey varies in composition and flavor depending on the source of the nectar. The average composition of honey is about 40% levulose, 35% dextrose, and 15% water, with the remainder being ash, waxes, and gum.

Blended honey is a mixture of pure honey and manufactured invert sugar, or a blend of different types of honey mixed together to produce a good consistency, color, and aroma. Dehydrated honey is available in a granular form.

Store honey in a tightly covered container in a dry place and at room temperature because it is hygroscopic, meaning it absorbs and retains moisture. Refrigeration or freezing won't harm the color or flavor but it may hasten granulation. Liquid honey crystallizes during storage and is re-liquefied by warming in a double boiler not exceeding a temperature of 58°C (136°F).

Honey is used in baking:

- As a sweetener
- To add unique flavor
- In gingerbread and special cookies where a certain moistness is characteristic of the product
- To improve keeping qualities

There are several types of honey available:

- Comb honey is “packed by the bees” directly from the hive.
- Liquid honey is extracted from the comb and strained. It is the type used by most bakers.
- Creamed honey has a certain amount of crystallized honey added to liquid honey to give body to the final product.
- Chunk honey consists of pieces of comb honey as well as liquid.
- Granulated honey has been crystallized.

In the United States, honey categories are based on color, from white to dark amber. Honey from orange blossom is an example of white honey. Clover honey is an amber honey, and sage and buckwheat honeys are dark amber honeys.

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