

Soft set honey - how to produce it - essentially, this is “The Dyce Process”

Equipment

Bucket of honey

Tub of ‘seed’ - 10% of bulk is suggested but there’s no need to be fussy. ‘Seed’ honey from the last bottling is kept in an ice-cream box. If you haven’t got any, plain OSR is good or buy a jar of Gale’s set honey from a supermarket. A honey with a fine grain, pleasant to the tongue, is wanted; commercial producers grind their seed.

Insulated, thermostatically controlled warming cabinet: capable of warming up to 62°C.

Digital thermometer

‘Ripener’ big enough to accept a bucket of honey - but not too big to lift!

Straining cloth & securing band. (I use Thorne’s 200 micron straining bag and stainless steel band & clamp.)

Long handled mixer

Jars and labels - make sure they comply with the law.

Process

- Run the honey from the extractor into buckets; I do not strain it at this stage. Seal.
- Store in as cool a place as possible (ideally, at 10°C or less). Exclude moisture.
- When jars of honey are required, set the warming cabinet thermostat to 49°C and warm a bucket of bulk honey until temperature achieved, this takes about 36 hours. Monitor the temperature using a digital thermometer. If OSR honey, the flavour will be improved if another honey can be warmed at the same time (usually a lesser quantity or the ripener may become too heavy to lift); this is added when straining.
- Skim and strain through a cloth. Ensure it is held securely in place. Strain into a ‘ripeners’. Shift ripener into kitchen - onto a tray in case of drips. (When convenient, feed the skimmings back to the bees.) Wash buckets and straining cloth first in cold water.
- Re-set the warming cabinet thermostat to 26-32°C and warm ‘seed’ honey for c.12 hours. Again, monitor the temperature. While this is warming, the bulk will be cooling, ideally also to 26-32°C, although this is not critical.
- Carefully tip seed into bulk and mix thoroughly, taking care not to add any air. Cover.
- Allow to stand and lose air; re-mix every 12 hours. Bulk will set (crystallise) to the same consistency as the seed. Continual mixing helps to prevent the honey setting too firmly.
- After 2 - 3 days (before the honey sets solid in the ripener!) bottle it, running the honey down the inside of the jar. Check jars contain appropriate quantity. (A good guide is that you can’t see daylight between honey surface and jar cap skirt.) We don’t skim again, reserving the last few jars with some scum/froth for home use.
- Leave on a flat level surface to set, ideally at 14°C; this takes only a few days.
- Label. Don’t forget a ‘Best Before’; I make it a year from the date of bottling but, fairly, you may choose a longer period. Legally, the water content may not exceed 20%. The lower the water content, the better it keeps. I wouldn’t be without my honey refractometer.