

The NewBee Guide to Making Mead - Appendix 1: Honey Varietals

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Honey Varietals Acacia - Light and delicate, with a flavor that reminds us of dried pineapple.

Alfalfa - Still more delicate. It does not taste like clove or allspice, and yet there is a subtle similarity of -- character?

Avocado - Dark and rich and full-bodied, and there is definitely a "family resemblance" to the avocado fruit! A very sensuous honey.

Basswood - This is one where the language of flavors is simply inadequate. Basswood is sharper than some; complex and interesting; possibly woody? We like it for tea --Earl Grey, say.

Bits & All - A very sweet, lighter wildflower (mostly clover) with none of the wax fragments, scraps of propolis or bee bits filtered out. This'n's got texture!

Blackberry - Medium light and exceptionally sweet! Popular with kids. It has a fruity character.

Blueberry - Midrange in color, blueberry is surprisingly rich-tasting. The "blueberry" note is, to me, faint to nonexistent, but visitors to Castlemark's booths have remarked on it with some enthusiasm.

Buckwheat - "Single-malt honey." The very strongest and darkest of honeys, it approaches blackstrap molasses (in my opinion). This is one that is much more than just a pretty sweetener, but will hold its own in whatever you want to cook!.

Christmas Berry - The taste is strong and exotic. It is of medium body and if I could come up with THE word, it would be exactly that word. As it is, it's not light or heavy, nutty or fruity, etc.

Clary Sage - Medium in strength and color, it is quite distinctive in its complex (read: "how do I describe *this* one???") flavor. One of Castlemark's gourmet customers proclaimed that it was "just what [he] expected of clary." I'll take his word for it. Like basswood, it makes a nice partner for tea when you want more than the tea flavor alone.

Clover - Just because it's familiar doesn't mean it can't be wonderful. One of the delicate, sweet ones; if a child's ever picked you a bouquet of clover, you know the fragrance of this one. It's our Meadmaking friend and Fergus's personal favorite.

Cotton - A bit on the dark side of medium, it is sooo smooth and rich and mellow. It's shaping up to be one of Castlemark's bestsellers

Cranberry - An exciting honey. It is medium sweet and the taste is tangy

Desert Sage - Light, with just a bit of edge to its character, and a pleasant dustiness

Echinacea - Unexpected! Medium-dark, it makes me think of a chewy granola bar (with coconut?) Should be good in cookies. I'll let you know

Eucalyptus - Yes, it does have a hint of that cool eucalyptus quality, sometimes a little more, sometimes barely there, in a pleasant mellow honey

Fireweed - *The* most popular! It has an extraordinary buttery taste -- if you like your toast or biscuit with butter and honey, you can leave off the butter (and save all those fat grams!)

Foxglove - Another complex, hard-to-describe one, it's our elder daughter's current favorite. Medium-dark, edgy, flavorful -- try it and write us what you think of it.

Goldenrod - "Golden" is a good name for this one. Well-rounded, not too sweet, it's the perfect "Winnie-the-Pooh" honey. Well -- that's what I said till I tasted Vetch. *That* tastes like perfect Winnie-the-Pooh honey, and it's nothing like goldenrod!

Heather - Though a lighter-than-medium gold color, it is one of the very strongest flavors -- and not to everyone's liking. It is fragrant and floral with a very lingering aftertaste that is almost bitter, the way hops is bitter. Castlemark recently made an amber ale and added heather honey: Celtic heaven!

Holly - A very pleasant honey. Medium sweet with some nutty overtones. Fun. The kids describe it as having the taste of

candycorn.

Lehua - From Hawai'i, it's middlin' gold and middlin' sweet and just plain weird in flavor. Anyone want to offer a better description? "Almost salty "-- Virginia Renaissance Faire patron

Linden - Looking for linden? Basswood is called "the American linden," and European visitors who sample it at Castlemark's Renaissance faire booth seem to agree. See above.

Macadamia - Another one from Hawai'i, yes it will remind you of the nut -- a "family resemblance" again. And it's almost as weird as lehua. Very rich-tasting, and amber in color.

Meadowfoam - Tastes like the inside of a warm marshmallow. Really!

Mesquite - Light, delicate, and it does taste like "mesquite" -- not smoky, but if you can taste the difference between mesquite-smoke and hickory-smoke, you'll have an idea what to expect of the honey.

Orange Blossom - A singularly beautiful honey, the taste of an orange grove in full bloom, light, heady and fragrant!

Palmetto - In a class with avocado and blueberry: somewhat strong, rich and mellow, and dark amber in color.

Raspberry - This is a delightful honey. It is light with a slightly fruity taste. Silky to the feel.

Snowberry - Light, sweet, with a bit of tang; not as "thick" as some

Sourwood - The prize of the Carolinas and Tennessee, this light-colored, delicate, subtle honey is becoming hard to come by, as stands of sourwoods are falling to developers. Not sour, but less sweet than some.

Thistle - Light in color and "lively" in flavor. Fun and popular!

Tulip Poplar - Second only to buckwheat in strength and darkness of color, and sweeter. Interesting, woody -- and makes an intense, dark mead!

Tupelo - Famed in song, one of the very sweetest honeys. Clear yellow in color, with a characteristic greenish glow.

Vetch - Above, I said goldenrod was Winnie-the-Pooh honey. Maybe vetch is, instead

Wildflower - This is what they call it when they weren't paying attention to where the bees were going. Expect wildflower to vary from season to season, and region to region.[Return to INDEX]