

HONEY VARIETAL GUIDE

Matching honey's flavors and aromatics to your next beer, spirits or bakery food recipe.





There are more than 3,000 varieties of honey, each with its own unique color, aroma and flavor.

These honeys are found everywhere, from your neighborhood to a small village in Mexico. Their unique sensory attributes are dependent solely on where bees forage for nectar.

If you place a beehive next to an orange grove in Florida, the honey bees will produce orange blossom honey. If you place a beehive next to a lavender field in France, the honey bees will produce lavender honey. Each of these honeys will be 100% pure, but possess different flavors and aromas.

Bakers, brewers and distillers can craft recipes using varietal honeys to deliver unique flavor profiles to stand alone or complement other ingredients in a recipe. Honey varietals also can be used to launch a line of products based on a singular formula. For example, a base saison or ciabatta recipe can have countless variations by simply changing the type of honey used. One change creates a completely different product.

Honey is one all-natural ingredient that has unlimited potential to enhance a recipe.

Best practices for using honey varietals

Brewers

Using honey on the cold side, right after peak fermentation, is the best way to preserve the aromatics and flavors of varietal honeys. If honey is added on the hot side, make sure to use a dark, robust flavored honey that will maintain its essence through fermentation.

Bakers

Bakers will be surprised how varietal honeys change a recipe's finished flavor and color. We recommend experimenting with a simple product such as granola to understand how the different honey varietals impact flavor, color and aroma after the product has been baked.

Distillers

When back sweetening a spirit with honey, darker honeys generally complement darker spirits, and lighter more delicate honeys pair better with clear spirits. When using honey as a primary distillate, honey varietals will completely change the flavor and aromatics of the finished product.





Orange Blossom

Location: Florida produces about 70% of the citrus crop in the United States, followed by California, Texas and Arizona.

Notes: Seldom are there enough bees to take advantage of all the nectar available in an orange grove.

Description: This light amber honey has a strong aroma of citrus fruit. The strong aroma notes carry over into the flavor with hints of floral, jasmine and citrus.



Buckwheat

Location: Northeast, particularly Pennsylvania and New York. About 70,000 acres of buckwheat are grown annually in the U.S., and an acre of buckwheat can produce 150 pounds of honey.

Notes: Conservationists plant buckwheat for wildlife food and as a cover crop. However, its seeds can also be ground into flour to be used as a gluten-free alternative.

Description: Its aroma carries earthy notes of barnyard and horse blanket. The flavor is very similar to its aroma with hints of maltiness, molasses and dark chocolate covered cherries.



Eucalyptus

Location: California

Notes: Eucalyptus trees were first brought to California from Australia to provide a fast-growing timber source. Now these handsome trees have become a major part of California's ecosystem, including providing a great source of nectar in the winter for California honey bees.

Description: This amber honey has very strong aromatics. Immediately you detect notes of menthol, leather and coffee. As you taste the honey, you should get medicinal flavor notes followed by tobacco, tea and butterscotch.

Hawaiian Lehua

Location: Hawaii

Notes: Lehua, meaning “flowers sacred to the gods,” blossoms are native Hawaiian flowers that grow over old lava. When harvested from the hive, Lehua honey is white and crystallized, with a naturally thick, spreadable texture. Ideal for tea drinkers, since it doesn’t mask the taste of the tea, it is also excellent for spreading on toast, mixing with nut butters and scooping directly from the jar!

Description: This honey can be water white to light amber in color depending on the state of the honey. It is often enjoyed creamed and spread on top of sweet goods or breads. Its aroma has earthy and woodland notes followed by many fruity flavor notes such as Bananas Foster, guava and mango, as well as butterscotch, brown sugar and creamy butter.



Alfalfa

Location: West of the Mississippi River

Notes: Alfalfa is the fifth largest crop grown in the U.S. behind corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton. The U.S. is also the world’s largest producer of alfalfa, with over 20 million acres grown annually.

Description: This light amber colored honey embodies delicate floral aromas with hints of straw, cinnamon and spice. When tasting, one should detect dry floral notes similar to dry hay or grass clippings.



Tupelo

Location: The swamps of Florida and Georgia

Notes: Tupelo honeys is often called the “Champagne of Honeys” due to its delicate flavor and the fact that it rarely, if ever, crystallizes. To collect tupelo honey, beekeepers must place their hives on river boats in the swamps of Florida and Georgia. In addition to this difficulty, tupelo trees also have a very short bloom, making the nectar hard to collect for bees in less than ideal circumstances.

Description: This extra light amber colored honey has pleasant spicy and fruit-filled aroma notes. Its taste is warm with flavor notes of cinnamon, butterscotch, nutmeg, floral jasmine and fruit pears.





Sourwood

Location: Appalachian Mountains

Notes: Although the sourwood tree is aptly named for the sour fragrances from its leaves and branches, this honey is anything but sour.

Description: Light amber in color, this honey possesses delicate vegetal and floral notes with a finish of warm spices, reminiscent of the holidays. The honey's mouthfeel coats your lips and mouth leaving you wanting more.



Meadowfoam

Location: Oregon

Notes: The meadowfoam flower is regional, only growing in Oregon's Willamette Valley. It's name is derived from the flower's resemblance to sea foam, just in a meadow.

Description: This light amber honey is a consumer favorite. With aromatic notes of vanilla and baking cupcakes and flavor notes of toasted marshmallows and cotton candy, what isn't there to love?



Acacia

Location: Eastern, southern and midwestern states

Notes: Acacia honey comes from the flowers of the black locust tree and is often called black locust honey. The black locust tree is used for wood and its fragrant flowers are used in home and city landscaping. In some areas, it is considered an invasive plant.

Description: This honey is unique for its water white color. With a light fruity and beeswax aroma, its flavor welcomes notes of butterscotch, almonds and vanilla.

Lavender

Location: France

Notes: There are close to 30 species of lavender, with purple, pink or white flowers.

Description: Extra light amber in color, this honey has floral notes of camphor, almond and vanilla. And, of course, lavender. Its flavor is slightly acidic with floral and perfumed notes.



Avocado

Location: Found in the U.S. from Texas to California, plus Florida and Hawaii and Mexico. California produces 90% to 95% of the U.S. avocado crop.

Notes: A healthy avocado tree in a good location may only produce 100 to 200 avocados from millions of blossoms – and that is VERY dependent on honey bee pollination!

Description: This dark amber honey represents one of the most popular fruits trending in the United States today. It carries aromatic notes of cooked butter and warm chestnuts, and its flavor profile touches on woody and smoky notes with hints of burnt sugar and caramel. Its mouthfeel is similar to that of the avocado itself, very creamy and coating.



Goldenrod

Location: Northeastern United States; also found in Canada and Mexico

Notes: Goldenrod has a rich history in the northeastern United States, where beekeeping first started in the country. Goldenrod is a very valuable nectar source in the fall for bees. Goldenrod can grow in a variety of habitats, from damp and swampy to high and dry, so it is often found on the sides of roads, at the edges of fields and fences and in unused and abandoned fields.

Description: Goldenrod honey can be almost perfectly transparent when extracted from the hive. This honey has beautiful floral, vegetal and woody notes but is prone to crystallization. So, enjoy quickly for a silky and pleasant feeling on your tongue. The flavor has bright notes of peony and honeysuckle and ends with notes of warm and spicy, almost reminiscent of autumn, in the back of your throat.



HONEY COLORS AND TASTING NOTES

The Pfund Scale is used to denote the colors of honey. Honey's color can vary from extra water white to dark amber. Nothing is added to honey to create these colors - it simply comes from the plants that honey bees pollinate!

An amazing thing about honey is no two honeys taste the same. With 300 varieties in United States and over 3,000 worldwide, you will find a variety of tastes, aromas and viscosities. A **Honey Aroma and Tasting Chart** (right) can help describe a honey's characteristics. Use the Pfund scale and Honey Aroma and Tasting Chart as a guide to take notes on honeys you taste. These notes will be the perfect inspiration as you craft a beer, spirit or bakery food recipe with honey.

Pfund Scale



Honey Aroma and Tasting Chart

CARAMEL	<i>Confectionary</i>	<i>Vanilla</i>	<i>Cocoa</i>
EARTHY	<i>Mushroom</i>	<i>Moss</i>	<i>Swamp</i>
CHEMICAL	<i>Pungent</i>	<i>Sulfur</i>	<i>Acidic</i>
MICROBIOLOGIC	<i>Lactic</i>	<i>Yeasty</i>	<i>Cheesy</i>
ANIMAL	<i>Barnyard</i>	<i>Leather</i>	<i>Locker Room</i>
FRUITY	<i>Berry</i>	<i>Citrus</i>	<i>Tropical</i>
FLORAL	<i>Lavender</i>	<i>Lilac</i>	<i>Rose</i>
HERBACEOUS	<i>Grass</i>	<i>Hay</i>	<i>Mint</i>
WOODY	<i>Smokey</i>	<i>Roasted</i>	<i>Pine</i>
NUTTY	<i>Pecan</i>	<i>Almond</i>	<i>Hazelnut</i>
SPICY	<i>Black Pepper</i>	<i>Ginger</i>	<i>Cinnamon</i>

Interested in learning more
about honey varietals?

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