

Honey Letter 1999

Today is the First of December. Even today, the wind is warm and out of the South. We have had a dry summer and drier, warm fall, which have given the bees a longer time than usual to gather their honey. We collected the honey in September from our three hives. We went back to our older method and we had a calm, efficient harvest. Tom got three stings extracting the honey in the centrifuge and I got none at all. I hesitate to say that my old method is superior to what we tried last year, but let me just point out that bees have a matriarchal society. Right now the drones are outside freezing to death. Enough said. We put it up into three five gallon buckets and later into the honey bears after selling some to the bakery and giving some to a colleague who plans to make Mead.

I also consolidated several years of collected wax which had been left over in bits and pieces of combs from the honey harvests, heating and washing it until it was clean and pure. Beeswax is

very durable and has been found in good condition in Egyptian tombs and freight from ship wrecks. The bees make it from honey and a little pollen. When bees are about to find a new home, they gorge themselves with honey. Once they are in their new home, the bees full of honey hang in chains in the hive and the honey is converted into wax scales that appear on their abdomens. Each pound of wax made requires four or five pounds of honey to make it. This is why beekeepers try to recycle honeycombs year after year, so that their bees don't have to waste honey making wax combs.

Beeswax is a very precious product in great demand for a wide variety of uses. The United States imports about half the beeswax it requires. The Roman Catholic Church used to require that all its candles be made of 100% pure beeswax, but as beeswax became increasingly scarce (or Catholics more numerous) they relaxed the requirement to 51%. It is used in

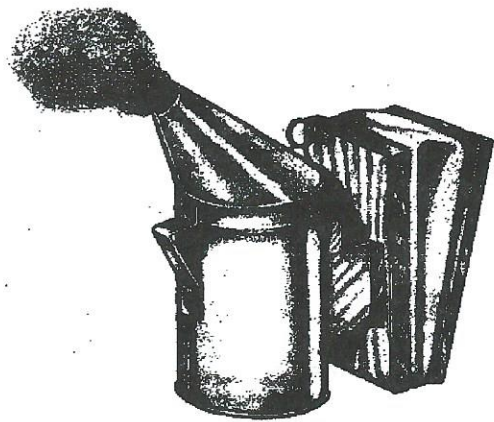


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cosmetics, especially lipstick. It is used by cooks to wax cookie sheets, by carpenters to wax screws to make them go in easier, and by furniture people on drawer slides. Because it strengthens and water proofs threads, it is used by tailors to strengthen thread for button sewing. Tom's Mother had a little round plastic beeswax cake holder in her sewing kit. Likewise saddlers and other leather workers strengthen their stitching with beeswax. Some people apply beeswax directly to leather to waterproof it. Ferriers sometimes use it to fill in around the nail holes after setting their clinches in the horse's hoof. It is also used to make the foundation that beekeepers put into their hives for the bees to draw into honey comb.

Beeswax is one of nature's most durable natural products. Its only enemies are fire and wax moths. Wax moths lay their eggs in honey comb and their larvae eat the honey comb before spinning a cocoon inside the hive. These moths can destroy a weak hive and are a problem for beekeepers who store their hives away from their bees. Fire of course melts wax and destroys the forest in

which a bee tree resides. For this reason, when the bees smell smoke they immediately run to the combs and begin to gorge themselves with honey so they can fly away from the forest fire and find a new home. This is why beekeepers use "smokers" to blow smoke into the hive, distracting the bees.



We hope you will find a use for this precious product, or can give it to someone who will. May your endeavors in the next millennium be as industrious and your successes be as enduring as the modest cake of beeswax enclosed herein.

BEST WISHES FOR A MERRY
CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW
YEAR!!!

LYSE AND TOM