

12-2011

## How Sweet It Is!

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### Recommended Citation

Craig, Winston J., "How Sweet It Is!" (2011). *Lake Union Herald*. 372.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/372>

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Honey has useful antibacterial properties.



## How Sweet It Is!

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Sweet foods always show up during the year-end holiday season; they add enjoyment to the festive occasions. Honey is one of the choices we have for a sweetening agent. It has a more pronounced flavor than sugar and a tendency to increase the browning of baked products.

Infused honey can be made by heating honey in a saucepan with an herb or spice such as ginger, mint, lime, orange, cinnamon, etc. The infused honey can be used in herb teas, on toast, carrots or cornbread.

Honey was one of the earliest sweeteners used by humans. Beekeeping dates back to the early Egyptians who used honey in embalming, in medicine and for food. In Palestine, honey was not only obtained from bees but was also commonly made from the fruit of the date palm. Honey was a staple in John the Baptist's diet.

Honeybees collect nectar from various floral sources and concentrate it in the honeycomb. To produce one pound of honey, bees may have to travel about 40,000 miles and visit more than two million flowers. There are more than 300 varieties of honey — the color, flavor and antioxidant content of honey are determined by the origin of the nectar, or the floral source; it also contains useful antibacterial properties. Darker honey, such as buckwheat and eucalyptus honey, has a stronger flavor due to the higher level of flavonoid antioxidants.

It is primarily a mixture of fructose and glucose in water, and also contains small amounts of many other sugars, vitamins and minerals. The blood glucose and insulin responses from honey are less than that for table sugar, which may benefit the person with diabetes. Due to the high fructose level in honey, we use less honey because it is sweeter than sugar. (Typically, one would use 20 percent less honey than sugar in a recipe.)



Honey is frequently used as an expectorant in the treatment of cough. Honey was also commonly used to treat wounds before the introduction of antibiotics. With an increasing number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, honey is now receiving renewed interest. Clinical trials have shown honey to be an effective broad-spectrum antibacterial agent with the ability to sterilize infected wounds. Dressings soaked with honey have been used to effectively heal wounds and treat postoperative infections, burns, skin ulcerations, boils and diabetic foot ulcers. Due to its osmotic properties, honey creates a moist wound-healing environment that does not stick to wound tissues. Honey can reduce inflammation and enables faster healing of wounds by promoting the formation of new tissues.

Recently chrysin, a flavonoid with potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, was identified in honey. Research has revealed its anti-tumor properties. It was shown to promote death of cancer cells and have an anti-proliferative effect on prostate cancer cells.

Honey is a concentrated sweetening agent with 64 calories per tablespoon, and should not be used without restriction. Honey is not recommended for infants who may develop infant botulism due to their inability to handle *Clostridium botulinum* spores that may be present in honey.

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