

Making Your Own Herbal Honeys

I first became interested in diversifying my apothecary when, after a certain point, it started to feel like I was just dumping vodka on everything! And the more I began working with bioregionally abundant herbs, the more I wanted to start exploring bioregionally abundant menstrooms, particularly the gorgeous raw honey available from numerous local beekeepers in my region.

Up until then, honey had somehow felt daunting, but a little experimentation can go a long way when it comes to herbs, and I soon became enamored with these preparations. After all, what's the use of being a bioregional herbalist if you're preserving all your medicine in hard alcohols imported from who-knows-where? I'm not at all dogmatically against using vodka, whiskey, brandy, etc for preserving herbs, and certainly have them in my apothecary, but if you have local access to beautiful raw organic honey, why not start working with this bioregionally abundant resource in earnest as well?



Not to mention it infuses your medicine with the true terroir of the land your herbs are from, resulting in some magical and medicinal preparations!

Honey Basics

I am deeply in love with herbal honeys, as many of my students will tell you! We put everything in honey and it works amazingly well on its own. Here's the trick- DON'T strain it. Also, make them with fresh herbs as much as you can. There are of course, many ways to work with herbs and honey and I'll discuss them below, but I've found that fresh herbal honeys are absolutely the way to go.



Energetics/Taste- Honey is sweet in flavor (quite obvious!), and heating and moistening in nature. In Ayurveda it is considered to be good for Vata and Kapha, and too heating for folks with excess Pitta.

Properties- Before you even add anything to it, honey is of course medicine unto itself. It's emollient (softening to the skin), moistening, an expectorant, anti-septic, a mild laxative, nutritive, and a rejuvenative. In Ayurveda, it is said to be an *anupana* (a vehicle) to bring herbs to the deepest tissue layer.

Constituents- Honey truly is a nutritive and contains an impressive array of vitamins and minerals. It contains Vitamin C, Riboflavin, Niacin, Vitamin B6, Folate, Pantothenic Acid, Choline, Betaine, Calcium, Iron, Magnesium, Phosphorous, Potassium, Zinc. Copper, Manganese, Selenium, Glucose, Fructose, and enzymes. It is about 20% water.

Fresh Herbal Honey

Ingredients:

1. Fresh herb of choice (almost any flower, herb, or root can be preserved in honey)
2. Raw Honey (preferably local)

To make:

Chop your herb pretty fine. Be sure your plant material and jar are completely dry- otherwise it will mold! Stir in the honey until the plant material is completely covered in honey, making sure the honey is completely mixed-in and coats all the plant material evenly. Cap and let sit at least 2 weeks before use. The herbs will tend to float to the top of the honey, so it can be helpful to stir it from time to time. I find that lots of the medicine is lost when you strain out the herbs, as one of the things honey does so well is simply capturing and preserving that plant in its fresh state. For this reason, I generally don't strain my honeys before use.



Wild Rose Honey

To use, I simply eat a scoop, add it to my tea, or use on its own to make “instant tea” by adding a few spoonfuls to hot water. Be sure to eat the plant material floating in your cup from the honey to get the full medicinal benefit. Another benefit is that once the herbs have been in the honey for long enough (6 month to a year) they tend to get candied, or crystalized, so you can remove them and use for decorating foods, or again just to munch on. I have a jar of fresh Osha root honey I made in 2006 that I still have and reserve for special cases, particularly with my kids. My youngest daughter tends towards super wet and boggy coughs and when she was a toddler particularly I would give her little pieces of the candied Osha root which she started referring to as “her gum” and would actually ask for! And of course, it helped her lungs immensely. And this also brings-up the topic of their life-span. The candied Osha root in honey is now over 12 years old and just as potent as ever. Herbal honeys generally never go bad (see trouble-shooting below though because mistakes can happen), do not loose strength with age, and they don't need to be refrigerated. And they can also be strained to make herbal syrups, elixirs, oxymels, for baking and kitchen medicine, and so on. For medicinal use 1 tbsp: 1 cup h2o is a medicinal dose and 3 cups/day should be drank, *being sure to chew and eat the herbs floating in your tea from the honey.* Or 1 3 tbsp/day of the herb-honey mix eaten by the spoonful or used in the variety of ways described above.

Troubleshooting fresh herbal honeys

Occasionally, because we're using raw honey, fresh herbal honeys like to start fermenting! I personally don't see this as a bad thing, and these honeys can be used as a starter for an amazing fermented herbal soda and aren't harmful when ingested at all. I just see this as more medicine and won't stop me from still using my honey. You can tell it's started this process if the jar lets out some gas or fizzes a bit when you open it, or also it will sometimes start oozing out of the lid. I have generally only see this happen with our local wild rose (*Rosa multiflora*) but I'm sure other herbs might do this as well. And sometimes they can mold. It will be obvious and look like a little white or clear film on the surface of the honey. Your honey is most likely to mold if the jar contained moisture or if the plat material itself was wet from dew or rain when you processed it. And of course there is the moisture in the fresh plant to contend with, and occasionally honeys made with plants that have a lot of water content (Dandelion flowers, Rose, Basil, etc) can mold. One trick around this is to let the plant material wilt overnight so some of the water content evaporates. And if you do see some mold, you can simply scoop it right off and you'll be fine! You will be able to easily see that the honey underneath is fine and un-affected. If I do have to remove mold from a honey I do refrigerate it after that as a precaution to help prevent further mold growth and this works great.

Herbal Honey Made with Dried Plants

Honeys made with dried herbs extract best when they are gently heated. Cover the herbs completely with honey, preferably raw. Combine the ingredients in a double boiler and mix well. Gently heat for 3-4 hours at least, until the honey has taken-on the flavor of the herbs. Be sure it never boils if you're working with raw honey. Another way to do this is to put the herbs and honey in a mason jar and gently warm in a hot water bath in a pan on the stove. I like to use a mason jar lid as a make-shift stand for the jar so it's not directly touching the bottom of the pan, which can help prevent the jar from unexpectedly breaking. Strain, and use as you would any herbal honey. You may also choose not to heat your herbs and honey and simply put the dried herbs covered in honey into a dry glass jar and let sit for 1-2 weeks, stirring daily if possible. Strain and use. Honeys are easiest to strain if the honey has been gently warmed, which makes it more viscous. Warm again in the warm water bath or double boiler and then strain through cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer while it's still warm. And a canning funnel will be a very useful tool here as well! Honeys made with dried herbs do not mold or ferment, unless some water accidentally gets in it either form a wet jar and so on.

Powdered Herbs in Honey

Powdered herbs may simply be stirred into honey and used as an herbal paste. To make, add enough powdered herb to the honey to make a dough-like consistency. Mix well. This can be a great way to get herbs into folks who have an issue with taste. This preparation is quite versatile and I really like rolling the paste into little 1 inch-sized balls and mixing it with ghee and other herbs for a simple take on Rosemary Gladstar's classic Zoom Balls. An herbal honey paste can also be eaten by the spoonful, or used to make instant tea by dissolving in hot water, added to steamed milk type of your choice for an amazing herbal latte, added to foods and so on! This preparation does not have to be refrigerated.

Favorite Staple Honeys in Our Home

Sassafras Lf (*Sassafras albidum*)- Sassafras isn't abundant enough in my bioregion to use the roots, so I started to work with the leaves, which I was delighted to discover are extremely mucilaginous and have become a favorite for dry coughs and winter dryness in general. We eat it by the spoonful or make instant tea by adding 1 tbsp to a cup of hot water. I find that by the



time the tea cools down enough to drink, the leaves, plus the mucilage, sink to the bottom of the cup, so I'm always sure to drink that part and eat the leaves for the full moistening effect. It also tastes amazing, fragrant, and fruity and is one of the best herbs I've found for the winter blues and can make you down-right giggly.

White Pine Needles (*Pinus strobus*)- This comes-out best when the needles are chopped pretty fine. It tastes like the forest and is comfort in a cup when added to tea. We also love it for cough and for a bioregional dose of Vitamin C

White Pine Honey

Yarrow Flowering Tops (*Achillea millefolium*)- We love this one as a tasty way to take this wonderful cold and flu herb. I'll give a cup of yarrow honey in hot water to my kids when I want some diaphoretic action to support a fever and help hydrate them as well.

Peppermint Herb (*Mentha piperita*)- An absolute go-to for stomach bugs, stomachaches, nausea, and as an over-all comforting, delicious cup of tea. Beloved by my daughter-kids love peppermint!

Onion (*Allium cepa*)- Onion makes the most amazing honey that is quite viscous like ginger and comes out like a syrup. To make simply chop an onion into thin slices, put in a mason jar. And cover with honey. The honey will make its way to the bottom of the jar via gravity and will extract all the immune-enhancing sulphur compounds and essential oils as it goes. This is kitchen medicine at its finest and can be eaten by the spoonful as a daily immune and lung tonic or for deep, wet, and difficult to resolve coughs. It's very powerful and actually tastes great!

