

Sweet Treatment for Pollen Allergies

A Spoonful of ... Honey



“The men of experiment are like the ant; they only collect and use. But the bee ... gathers its materials from the flowers of the garden and of the field, [and] transforms and digests it by a power of its own.”

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), the renowned painter and Renaissance man

by Louise M. Mitchell

“Locally produced honey is a naturopathic remedy for treating pollen allergies in people,” says Jeffrey Kiker, ND. He emphasizes the importance of “locally” produced, saying, “The best honeys for allergies are harvested within 50 miles from where you live or spend most of your time.” Jeff is a naturopathic doctor practicing in Bergen Park with his wife Shawna Kiker, ND. Local beekeeper and entrepreneur Bob Campbell is pleased to help them respond to the need with 100 percent raw wildflower honey produced from his Evergreen hives. Raw honey is filtered, unprocessed, unheated, and pure.

How does honey treat allergies? Jeff describes the philosophy behind naturopathic treatment of allergies. It is the ingesting of a small amount of pollen in honey to help build up a person’s tolerance to pollen in the atmosphere by strengthening the user’s immune system. The honey acts as an immune modulator. The antihistamine effects of local honey are best when the honey is taken a little bit (1 tablespoon) a day for several months prior to the pollen season. Using “all” natural treatment like honey is supportive to standard medical practices, such as allergy shots.

Jeff suggests that his patients start with a very small dose of ¼ teaspoon to make sure they can comfortably assimilate the honey. They can slowly increase the amount to 1 tablespoon/day. A note of caution is that raw honey is *contraindicated for infants* less than one year of age.

“Many factors can contribute to the state of a person’s immune system,” Jeff explains, “Such as sitting in traffic, lack of sleep, and foods. When the immune system is fatigued, environmental factors like pollen can have a greater influence on the person’s state of health. Allergies often arise from continuous over-exposure to the same allergens over time. This is often made worse in areas and in seasons where plants are predominately pollinated by wind. Using nature to re-balance the immune system is the very heart of naturopathy.”

The naturopath's approach to healing is holistic, and the broad medical bag includes physical medicine like massage, botanicals, functional evaluation of blood work and hormone levels, identification of food allergens, and assessment of environmental toxicity.

"Our approach," says Shawna, "treats the cause, rather than masking the symptoms as prescription drugs can do." Their practice provides preventative and chronic care for patients.

Sweet findings on honey include:

- In naturopathic use, honey can help people with pollen allergies improve their tolerance to the overall environment.
- Honey is the sweetest food found in nature and studies indicate that it aids in balancing sugar in the body.
- Honey, kept properly, is the only food that will not spoil, and it can be stored indefinitely without refrigeration.
- Honey has a strong antioxidant effect.
- Applied topically, honey is superior first aid for burns. It seals off the injured area to air currents and reduces pain and the possibility of infection.
- The antibacterial effect of honey applied topically has been known since the 19th century.
- Components in honey may also possess anti-inflammatory activity and stimulate immune responses within a wound, assisting the immune system in clearing infection from the wound and improving tissue-healing times.

According to research, the western bee (*Apis mellifera*) is estimated to be one million years old; domesticated since roughly 2600 BC, about the time the pyramids were built in Egypt. It is one of 20,000 known species of bees.

Back at the hives. Bob keeps six hives from which he can harvest 25 pounds of honey per hive in a good year. A beehive is a low box-like form set on level brick foundations with a bottom board and landing platform that hold a brood super and a honey super that are topped by a waterproof aluminum top cover. Each hive houses 20,000 to 50,000 bees and 1 queen.

The Italian honeybees Bob raises are gentle and produce good honey. They are prolific breeders and strong foragers. The quality of the hive's honey is a reflection of the quality of the queen bee. If a hive produces lethargic or angry bees, Bob recommends replacing the queen.

The bees were in the hives when I visited in January, but no activity was apparent. Amazingly, they keep their body temperatures at 90 degrees, regardless of outside weather conditions, and when the outside temperature rises above 55 degrees, signs of activity are visible. As it warms, the bees appear on their landing platform for the first time each year. Traveling up to a radius of two miles from the hive, they collect pollen, nectar, and water. Returning to the hive, they alight on the landing platform with the colorful

"The only reason for making a buzzing noise that I know of is because you're a bee... The only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey...and the only reason for making honey is so I can eat it."

Winnie the Pooh, A.A. Milne's
The House at Pooh Corner

pollen visible on their legs and bodies before re-entering the hive to digest the foraged delicacies, and regurgitate and store it in a hexagonal wax cell as a perfect golden amber gift from nature to humankind.

We have all heard the phrase *make a beeline*, referring to the shortest route between two places. Here is a new term: the *bee dance* or *waggle*. Being social insects, bees returning to the hive perform a *bee dance*. When a bee finds a food source, she returns to the hive and performs a vibrating figure-eight dance that translates into the flight distance and flight directions in relationship to the sun from the hive back to the food source. Other bees understand and interpret the signals and forage back to the source. The waggle is a bee's GPS readout, so to speak.

Are you wondering if the local wildlife would disturb the beehives? The answer, according to Bob's experience, is yes. The bears have been more than interested. In his first year of beekeeping, a 250-pound male bear came through the beekeeping yard situated on a south-facing slope, licked up every ounce of honey, and destroyed the hives. Bob and his family watched the bear frolicking around on a sugar high for three days, his fur coat shimmering. The Colorado Department of Wildlife offers assistance to beekeepers who request it by providing the essential parts for electric fencing. Since he installed the fencing, Bob has had only a few problems with wildlife intrusions.

The loss of honeybee populations in North America has been written about and investigated. While the cause of this Colony Collapse Disorder is not known for certain, both Bob and Jeff agree with the determination that it is a combination of a bacteria, fungus, and Varroa mites, which together in the environment can cause bees to not find their way back to the hive.

The honeybee is intelligent, organized, and hardworking. In their first two weeks of life, female honeybees are housekeepers. In the next stage they are nurses, tending to the queen and the new babies. In the third stage of life, they become foragers, finding nectar and pollen for about one month when they tire out and die.

Some interesting beekeeping tips are:

- The Italian bee (*Apis mellifera ligustica*) that Bob favors for his hives is a subspecies of the western honeybee (*Apis mellifera*).
- Hive maintenance is performed weekly in summer.
- Harvesting occurs at the end of summer.
- Average annual harvest from one hive in Evergreen is 25 pounds of honey. With a longer flowering season in Denver, beekeepers there can extract as much as 100 pounds of honey in a good year.
- The Queen produces eggs for five years after one single mating.
- The Queen bee decides which eggs are female and which are male as she lays them to maintain a hive with about 99% females (infertile workers) and 1% drones (males).



Bob Campbell decapping a fresh frame of honey at Bergen Valley Elementary School.

Gardening is challenging in the Foothills, and for those who are interested in spending a few hours each week of summer tending to a hive in preparation for the end-of-summer honey harvest, beekeeping is an exciting, ecologically minded, and healthful alternative. Requirements are a sunny location, such as a south-facing slope, and most likely, electric fencing.

Beekeeping supplies and beginning and advanced beekeeping classes are available through the Denver store “To Bee...or not...To Bee.” Additional resources include www.Bees-on-the-Net.com and the Colorado State Bee Association (www.coloradobeekeepers.org).

Louise M. Mitchell, President of Mountain Writers, is a free-lance writer and author of *Feet Upon the Earth, the Ordinary Person's Guide to Seeking an Extraordinary Life*. She teaches meditation and the spiritual connection to nature. Her website is www.LaughingWatersWay.com.

Holistic Therapies, LLC, is located at 1301-C Bergen Parkway in Evergreen, where Jeffrey and Shawna Kiker, NDs, provide naturopathic treatment for patients. Their website and phone number are www.HolisticTherapies.us and 303.679.3402.

Beekeeper Bob Campbell and his wife Elizabeth have had their apiary since the mid-80s. Bob is active with the Evergreen Chamber of Commerce, President of Incognito Solutions (a web design firm), and keeps busy organizing mountain biking expeditions and riding his bike with Team Evergreen.



Student Aaron Whitaker is fascinated during Bob's demonstration of honey extraction as it drips into the white bucket.

Photo Credits:

Louise M. Mitchell – Jeff and Shawna with Jar of honey
Pictures of Bob and Aaron - Courtesy of Bob Campbell

word count: 1,642