

Honey: A Connoisseur's Guide with Recipes

Gene Opton

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What makes a certain honey a Silver Spoon Selection? According to the author, "A flavor so nuanced that it is best appreciated in tiny discrete amounts. Honey that you would choose to eat from a spoon." In this respectful voice, connoisseur Opton gathers facts and sometimes trivia along with recipes for pastries, fruits, vegetables, entrées and desserts—all honey-touched-into a book of interest not only to honey lovers, but also to readers attentive to food literature.

He briefly traces honey's history and explains how it comes to market. Then, with exacting detail and affection for his subject, he guides readers through a Minnesota bee and honey hall, from the harvesting demonstrations at the entrance to the displays of moveable-frame hives that are the basis of today's honey industry.

The section called "The Flavors of Honey" covers the gathering of the nectar, how to taste honey ("scrape a portion of the soft mass with your thumb to taste it"), the combinations such as mild and strong or floral and herbal and descriptions of honey varieties from Acacia to Wildflower, with a detailed description and explanation of each. The book has eight pages of honey sources with their specialties noted.

The recipes are worthy, and most will be new to readers. Happily, Opton names his recipes simply and clearly, for instance, Honey Nut Crumbcake, Cheese Tart with Berries or Pork Loin roasted with Orange and Ginger. Some, like Tomato Sherbet in Avocado Cups, are au current; others are ethnic like Borscht with Sour Cherries; and still others are down-home like Milk and Honey Loaf bread or Upside-Down Apple Cake.

Although honey is not a traditional American ingredient, Opton wisely includes regional American recipes that are fairly simple and work well in American menus. Honey is an undertone in New England Pumpkin Pie, but it is a tasty counterpoint to the main ingredient in Deep South Sweet Potato Pie. The book also includes recipes for dressings, syrups and toppings.

"Some honeys so captivated me that I gave them special designations," writes Opton. "Honey with a distinctive flavor, of interest to the most sophisticated palate, representing a particular dimension in the range of flavor possibilities," is a Connoisseur Selection. Honey is an apt choice for connoisseurs and the curious.

SALLY KETCHUM (March / April 2000)

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