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Honey, it's Harvest Time!

By Cathy Tyson



Everyone involved in this photo was stung. Photo
Jaya Griggs

at the top.

The 'honey super' holds the honey-stocked comb in a slightly shallower box containing about 10 frames placed directly above the hive - kind of a spacious penthouse addition for the bees to stretch out and use for processed nectar deposits. When the honeycomb is full, the bees cap the comb with beeswax.

During the honey procuring process, the wax cap is first removed very carefully with a hot knife, then the frames are placed in the extractor and like a giant homemade ice cream machine, the cranking creates centrifugal force that sucks the honey out of the comb and down the interior of the drum to collect at the bottom, leaving the frames and the comb intact.

On a recent warm afternoon, toasty temperatures helped with the viscosity of the honey; Wendy Scheck was armed for the first time ever with a hot knife and specific instructions from the Bee Rancher.

The couple set up in their garage for their initial extraction, the four frames that they took honey from that day producing about 10.20 pounds of honey. Partnering in the newspaper business as well as in honey harvesting, Wendy Scheck carefully sliced off the top layer of waxy comb. She had to be diligent; it's easy to melt the entire comb if the knife is too close or slices too slowly. After the frames were spun in the extractor, any debris or bits of wax comb that may have gotten loose were filtered out, leaving only fresh clear honey that was finally poured into glass containers.

The Vigos had a bountiful harvest as well, and will sell jars of the liquid gold at Jennifer Vigo's store in Orinda, ReChic Boutique 101, under the very exclusive Bee Rancher "Lamorinda Wild Flower Honey" label.

The Schecks said leaving the remainder of the comb intact was good advice from Vigo - it's like doing a slight remodel, rather than a complete tear down. This way the bees won't have to expend as much energy to re-create an entire comb, giving them more energy to focus on honey production. They gently cleaned the frames and returned them to the hive.

"In theory a hive should produce 50 to 100 pounds of honey in one full season," said Vigo. The total honey production number includes a second harvest in late fall. "My worry about 2013 is rainfall; especially after a dry 2012, it might not produce an ample nectar flow."

The Schecks are thrilled with their first harvest, and consider themselves bee landlords since the estimated 60,000 to 70,000 bees in their hive can always leave if they're not happy.

And much like any good landlord, the Schecks give the bees enough space, a well maintained home and, mostly, leave them alone.

For information about honeybees, harvesting and more, visit beerancherbuzz.com.

For Andy and Wendy Scheck, publishers of Lamorinda Weekly, it was a day that was over a year in the making. They got their debut bee hive from Mike Vigo, also known as the Bee Rancher, back in 2012. After a tough winter, and their queen flying the coop, they patiently hoped for the day they could finally experience a bountiful honey harvest.

Andy Scheck clearly caught the honey-making bug, and regularly kept an eye on his backyard hive when not attending to the paper. He described their first honey extraction as an "amazing experience" - golden yellow payback time.

With generally good, if slightly dry weather this spring, the accompanying nectar flow was just what these buzzing workers needed for honey production. With a new prolific queen, the couple witnessed an explosion of bee activity as their backyard guests foraged around their lush garden and around the neighborhood.

After the bees did their part, it was time for the humans to suit up and get cranking - literally. The Schecks recently purchased their own shiny extractor - basically a stainless steel drum with a version of a rotisserie inside - that holds frames from the 'honey super' with a hand crank



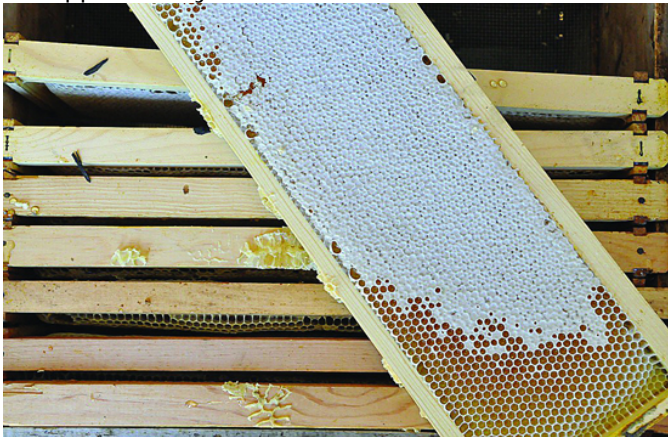
Wendy Scheck uncaps a frame with the hot knife



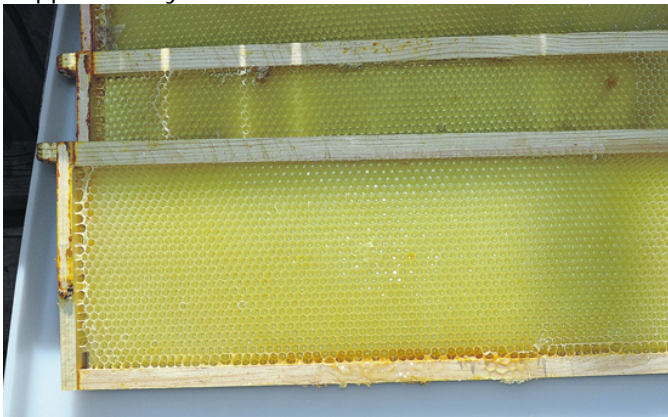
Honey drains from Vigo's extractor Photo Barbara Boster



Uncapped honey Photo Barbara Boster



Capped honey Photo Barbara Boster



Empty frames Photo Andy Scheck

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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