

BEESWAX – A POPULAR SHOW ENTRY

Ann W. Harman
Flint Hill, VA

Whether a honey show is large or small, a block of beeswax is one of the favorite classes. Many beekeepers are finding that making candles is a better source of income than selling beeswax in bulk. Therefore many shows include classes for candles, molded or dipped.

One criterion that most shows agree on is the preferred color for wax. “Straw to canary yellow” is one of the most common terms. Actually those colors come mostly from pollen. Wax as produced by the bee is almost white as it hardens. But our sources of wax are the cappings and the combs so our wax colors are influenced by the coloring from pollens and perhaps to a small extent the coloring compounds in propolis that is tracked around the hive.

The final color of beeswax can be influenced by the processing. Iron, either in the water or in containers used in melting, turns the wax into a color best described as that of dirty khaki pants that should have been thrown away last year. This remarkable color can also be achieved by melting down your best cappings wax with old brood combs, scraps of wax found on the floor and bits and pieces of frame wires. Therefore, the color of beeswax is important in judging.

Beeswax that has been melted too much, kept at too high a temperature too long, or otherwise mistreated in processing will lose that wonderful aroma and also texture. A good piece of beeswax feels waxy. Overheating will cause it to feel more granular and less waxy, a bit difficult to describe. Texture is best learned through experience.

Cleanliness is another important criterion. Wax, before cleaning up, contains a wonderful assortment of stuff. If the wax is to be sold in bulk or made into candles, the best price and the best candles come from clean wax. “Stuff” in wax settles to the bottom and can be found on the bottom of blocks and at the top of molded candles. Since it is really possible to remove all of the fine particles, cleanliness is judged critically. Marks left by scraping a block indicate that dirt was removed. Although now it is a clean block it would not receive as high a number of points as a block that shows no scrape marks.

Wax that has been heated to too high a temperature will shrink and crack upon cooling. So the appearance of beeswax is judged carefully. The block of beeswax must be poured all at once, not in layers, especially not in layers of different colors of wax.

Candles are a marketable item. Therefore the criteria reflect what customers are looking for. Cleanliness, certainly, so that the candles look beautiful. Wicks on molded candles need to be 1/2 inch for easy lighting. The bottoms need to be smooth and flat. If the entry is a pair of candles, then those must be a matched pair – same diameter, same length – or they are not a matched pair. Take a look at commercial candles and you will see that the judging criteria matches those.

Dipped candles are another story. The wicks should be joined showing that they were dipped as a pair. The bottoms should have the last drip. That is simply a fancy touch showing that the candles are indeed dipped.

Beekeepers have many tricks for producing good wax and wax products. Keep the judging criteria in mind when processing wax and you will realize the best price.