



Foraging the Wild Hive

BACKGROUND

When it comes to foraging for alternate food sources in God's pantry, few things can seem more daunting at first, yet ultimately more gratifying, than harvesting from a wild honey bee hive. Never fear. With a little preparation, patience and persistence, you'll soon start enjoying this delicious and golden bounty. Depending on your area, the best time to harvest is late summer when honey production has peaked and the cells of the honeycombs are covered over with a protective thin white layer.

BENEFITS & USES

Wild Honey

- A good source of antioxidants which help to protect your body from cell damage due to free radicals that contribute to aging and the development of chronic diseases
- Helps kill unwanted bacteria and fungus and naturally contains hydrogen peroxide
- As an effective germ killer, it can be used to treat wounds and aid in tissue regeneration
- A phytonutrient powerhouse that has some immune-boosting and anticancer benefits
- Aids in soothing a soar throat and effective as a cough suppressant
- Sometimes used to treat digestive issues such as diarrhea

Beeswax

- A natural alternative to treat many skin conditions including psoriasis and eczema, particularly because it is hypoallergenic
- Used as a skin moisturizer, also a critical ingredient in balms and salves
- Can help relieve pain and acts as an anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and anti-viral
- There are many other applications including beeswax candles, wood/furniture polish and sealant, leather shoe polish, beeswax soap, lubricants, and more

PREPARATION

Take a good shower before heading out, avoiding application of anything but a scentless deodorant. Wear clean clothes that let your skin breath and easily absorb perspiration, preferably modest colors that don't act as camouflage, nor serve as a flashy beacon. The bees need to see you coming, but not get overly agitated. Sweat and perspiration add to the possibility of getting stung. As with any creature encounter in the wild, it's best to always remain calm and at peace.

Foraging the Wild Hive *(continued)*

Prep a simple day pack sufficient for stomping around the wild areas, but don't over-do the weight which can add to perspiration and fatigue. Keep it simple. At a minimum you'll need:

- Tupperware for the honey and honeycombs (I prefer large, lightweight Ziplock freezer bags)
- Sharp hunting knife (preferably with a long blade)
- Small lightweight wooden box with a piece of screen (or some such) for a lid
- Small dish and small container of artificial nectar
- A dependable lighter or two
- A compass
- A bee smoker and plenty of fuel (if you want to get fancy)... I prefer 2-3 mild cigars instead

LOCATING THE HIVES

When the weather is warm and the flowers are blooming, it's time to start looking for wild honey bee hives. To get started, simply find some honey bee swarms buzzing around the flowers, whatever your terrain consists of. Naturally the bees are fond of the flower types that produce the best and most abundant nectar.

Once you find a swarm, don't expect the bees to just tell you where the colony houses itself, and unless you've got the mobility of a bird, you're not going to easily follow them back to the hive.

Time to get your little wooden box out, put the dish in the bottom and fill it with the artificial nectar (made from 2 tablespoons of honey, 6 tablespoons of sugar, and enough water to completely dissolve both the ingredients).

Next, calmly place the open box with the nectar where you've located a swarm of bees. You can even add some lemongrass oil directly in the bee box as an added lure. Sit tight until the box has attracted a group of bees and gently put the screen over the top. Wait a few minutes while they stop buzzing and finish eating. Now, gently remove the top and let them take flight. After circling a bit, they're heading to the hive, so note the flight path (this may require 2 to 3 trip cycles) and use a watch (or 1-1000 counting method) to determine how long it takes them to return to the box after heading to their hive. As a gauge:

- 3 minutes or less means the hive is likely less than 1/4 mile away
- 5-10 minutes means about 1/2 mile away
- 10-20 minutes means about 1 mile away

Once you're confident of the flight path (the beeline) and the approximate distance, head in that direction. The compass will come in handy if the terrain has a lot of growth and/or variations in elevation. As you go, keep an eye on all the other bees taking the same route and start looking for the trees, holes, cavities, fallen logs, rock formations, etc. that may shelter the hive.



Foraging the Wild Hive *(continued)*

HARVESTING THE HONEY AT THE HIVE

If you've gotten this far and located the hive, congratulations! You're in the home stretch. If you brought along the bee smoker, it's time to fire it up. If you're like me, fire up a cigar so it's producing some prolific amounts of gentle smoke.

If no cigar, you can gather up some leaves and tinder brush, pine needle branches, or some such, bind it tightly together torch-like and fire that up. Make sure you include some green stuff (it may not burn well, but it will help produce abundant smoke). Only use the natural elements available at your location. Do not use paper or any other manmade materials that contain chemicals.

Bottom line is, you're going to need to apply a gentle smoking to the hive. No, the smoke won't knock them out, but it will impede their ability to communicate, warn each other of danger, and mount a coordinated attack with their stingers.

Be gentle at this point, moving calmly and deliberately. It's time to harvest the honey and some honey combs by any means necessary without completely destroying the hive and the colony. This is where the hunting knife with the long blade and the tupperware (or Ziplock bags) will come in handy. Be sure to take only what you need and leave some of the hive intact so the colony can survive.

PROCESSING YOUR WILD HONEY HARVEST

Back at home (or base camp as the case may be), use a wooden spoon to crush up your honeycombs and globs of honey in the tupperware or ziplock backs. Take another clean container such as a pot, place a collander on top, and add a cheese cloth to cover the collander for straining purposes. Empty all of your harvest into the collander.

It will usually take 1-2 days for the honey to strain into the pot. Make sure you do this indoors where it won't attract more bees, or worse -- bears.

Finally, pour the honey into some clean glass jars for preservation, pantry storage and future use.

