



Arizona Specialty Honeys

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Beekeepers in Arizona are lucky to live in a state where the growing season is long and there is something in bloom almost all year long. Many beekeepers choose to have one apiary location and harvest 'wildflower' honey once a year (\$2.18 per pound)ⁱ. Other beekeepers choose to move their hives according to what is blooming and harvest specialty monofloral honeys (\$12 to \$18 per pound) from each nectar flow. With a little planning and cooperation with landowners or farmers, they can produce much more honey per hive as well as charge more per pound for their honey produced. To get truly monofloral honey the hive must be placed where there is an abundance of one floral resource, and not much else. Bees tend to focus on the type of nectar that is most abundant and easily available, so they cooperate with this type of management. Honeybees will fly up to 3 miles to find nectar and pollen, but they love efficiency, so placing them in the middle of, or at the edge of a large crop will ensure the best results. Pollination by bees can increase fruit set and quality as well as seed set by up to 70% in some crops! Best pollination occurs when there is at least one robust hive per acre.

Many beekeepers in Arizona move their hives in February to the Almonds in California for pollination. Colonies over

wintered in Arizona can find early pollen from Cottonwood, African sumac, Red maple, and Eucalyptus starting in January and February. Citrus (oranges, lemons, limes, mandarins, grapefruit) will start to bloom in March and there are still several large orchards and remnants around the state. In April the main nectar flow is from Mesquite, Cat's claw Acacia, and fairyduster plants which can bloom until June depending upon winter rainfall. Mesquite can even bloom a second time later in the year if enough rainfall is received. Honey from Mesquite, Cat's claw and fairyduster crystallizes rapidly so must be harvested as comb honey or extracted as soon as possible to be able to get



Two types of honey in bottles to show their color.



Alfalfa honey set up for tasting. Alfalfa is a dark strong honey.

ⁱ https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Montana/Publications/News_Releases/2021/MT-Honey-Production-03182021.pdf



Several honeys lined up for honey tasting.

it out of the honeycomb. April is also when stone fruits like apple, cherry, plum, peaches, apricots, and pears will start to bloom in orchards. Fruit set is improved by 70% when bees are placed for pollinating these crops, so find orchards that need your bees. Cotton and Guayule start to bloom in May and will continue to October if you can find some fields available. Alfalfa can also bloom heavily from May to October if the farmer allows it to flower before cutting. Speak to farmers near you to see what their practices are before adding this crop to your plan as there might be long days of no floral resources following each cutting. Other summer crops include Prickly Pear cactus, cantaloupe, watermelons, cucumbers, onion and carrots grown for seed. The Tamarix family will start to bloom late summer, which includes the athel tree and salt cedar. Agaves and Buckbrush will also bloom during this time.

Let's look at some of the Arizona crops that could produce specialty honeys.

Acacia – April to June for Cat's claw, a very fine smooth crystal honey that stays soft and creamy, delicate, flowery

Alfalfa – May to October, light, mild, spicy, floral

Apples – March to April, light, sweet, fruity

Apricot – March to April, light, sweet, fruity

Cantaloupe – March to May,

Carrot – April to May, strong, earthy, caramel tones,

Cherry – April, light, sweet,

Citrus – February to March, each citrus is slightly different, orange is fruity, tones of gardenia and jasmine,

Cotton – May to October

Dates – February

Desert bloom – dependent upon winter or monsoon moisture, April

Eucalyptus – December to February, depends on species, intense, savory, salty,

Fairyduster – a very fine smooth crystal honey that stays soft and creamy

Fireweed – June to September, delicate, fruity, sweet, smooth,

Guayule – May to October

Ironwood – May

Lavender – May to June, hints of dry hay and fresh peaches

Mesquite – April to July, sometimes a second bloom after monsoon, a very fine smooth crystal honey that stays soft and creamy, warm caramel, woody, smoky, nutty, light floral,

Palo verde – April

Peaches – March to April

Pear – April, light, fruity, sweet, floral

Plum – March to April

Prickly Pear – May, sweet and fruity

Pumpkin – June to July, light and floral

Sage – June to September, mild and sweet,

Watermelon – March to May,

Remember that honey supers must be pulled off and replaced with an empty super between each crop. The full supers should be harvested within a few days. The harvested supers should be frozen for three days to destroy any wax moth larva, then can be reused for the next honey crop. Honey should be bottled and labeled with the type of honey contained inside. When you market your honey, be sure to give a quick description of the unique taste, aroma, and flavor of each type of honey to educate your customers. If selling at a farmers' market, you might want to offer tastes of all the different honeys you have and suggest ways to best use them. The more you can educate a customer about your honey, the more likely they will be to purchase more, become a repeat customer, and tell their friends.

Refer to the publication **Tasting Honey** for more information and food pairing ideas.

References

- Honey for Dummies by C. Marina Marchese and Howland Blackiston
- The Backyard Beekeeper: An Absolute Beginner's Guide to Keeping Bees in Your Yard and Garden (4th Edition) by Kim Flottum
- The Beekeepers Bible by Richard A. Jones and Sharon Sweeney-Lynch
- The Beekeeper's Handbook (4th Edition) by Diana Sammataro and Alphonso Avitabile
- The Complete Bee Handbook by Dewey Caron



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