Sustainacycle's Sustainable Living Center
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Gifts from the Hive

What: The gifts include; honey, wax and brood, or bee eggs and larvae. The brood can be used to supplement a weaker or smaller hive.

Why: We are allowed to harvest both wax and honey from our hives as gifts from the bees, several times throughout the seasons. This is possible through the natural processes that bees perform to store food for winter and to ensure that the next generation will continue to thrive. By harvesting these gifts we help our colonies by creating a good stewardship relation with them. Our actions directly affect their ability to reproduce and to ward off disease and predatory pests. It is important to "*keep an eye*" on your hive.

When: In Central Texas, our main honey and wax harvests are at the end of winter (late Feb. – early Mar.) then again just before fall sets in (late Aug. – early Sep..) Of course there are times that these will also be available during the middle of the seasons too.

How: Different equipment is required depending on what type of operation you run, Langstroth or top bar. We run top bars at Sustainacycle, so we'll discuss these. To receive wax and/or honey and brood, the process is the same.

1-Lightly smoke the bees to calm them down.
2-Remove the desired bar(s) and gently smoke or brush off the bees.
3- Cut the comb from the bars, leaving traces of wax behind as a guide for them to rebuild on.
4-Return these bars to the hive. Any defective bars (broken or otherwise damaged) should be replaced at this time.
5-Any comb containing brood should be returned to the hive with the use of a capture bar.*

6-Now all that's left is to manually squeeze the comb, releasing all of the sweet honey that is trapped in it. We use a 600 micron screening tray* to trap any dirt or debris.
7-Once you have harvested the honey, rinse your wax and store it in the freezer until you are ready to render it.
8-To render the wax, (Cliff Notes version) use a double boiler configuration to melt it. Melting point of beeswax is 144-147 degrees F. Temps over 185 degrees F will discolor wax, as will debris too.
9-When the wax has reached its melting temperature; pour it through a fine mesh colander into a 5 gallon bucket with a couple of inches of clean, cool water in it, to help set it and remove debris. The debris will settle out or cling to the bottom of the floating wax. Repeat this step, as necessary to remove any debris. Clean melted wax may be poured into molds, if desired.

Frequently Asked Questions

-How long does it take for nectar and pollen to turn to honey? Well the easy answer is, it's ready when it's ready. Time will vary depending on sugar, moisture content and environmental conditions such relative humidity.

-What is honey? Honey is a mixture of nectars, pollens, water and bacteria carried by bees that undergoes a magical process inside the honeycomb and ferments into honey.
Facts: Honey contains 52 different sugars. Honey is the ONLY food that includes all the substances necessary to sustain life, including water.

-What can beeswax be used for? Beeswax can be used for anything that we use petroleum wax for including; cosmetics, medicinal applications, wood polishes and more…

-Why is Local Raw Honey better? Please see our PDF called;

The Benefits of Local Raw Honey located on our Virtual Library
http://www.sustainacyclekyle.com/virtual-library

* Capture bars and plans, as well as, honey screening equipment is available in The Center.