



Healing Tea for Honeybees

For the last 15 years I have been using and teaching the value of healing teas for the honeybee colonies in support of today's weakened metabolic and immune system. In the last years we have seen how this practice has spread and is now used widely in natural and sustainable beekeeping throughout the country.

The inspiration for our recipe comes from the healing herbs used in the biodynamic compost preparations. These herbs are well known in human herbalist tradition. From the six herbs used for ameliorating and furthering basic metabolic processes in the compost—flowers of chamomile, yarrow, dandelion, valerian, leaves/stems of stinging nettle, and oak bark—we took 4 of them and selected a few others that add to the desired positive effects. In my years of gardening I have learned to understand and love all these herbs; they have been my dear companions.

Gunther Hauk

For general strengthening

Quantity is for two treatments - you need two 1-quart jars

In a ceramic or stainless steel pot (not aluminum) bring **3 cups** of good water (well or spring is best) to a boil, take off stove and add:

- **1/2 tsp.** each of: chamomile, yarrow, stinging nettle, peppermint, (dandelion flowers, if available)
- **1/4 tsp.** each of: sage, hyssop, thyme, lemon balm, echinacea
- **1 pinch** of rue

Let steep for 10 minutes. Strain through a cloth or fine colander; add another 3 cups of cold water and let cool down until it is lukewarm.

Add 1 cup (1/2 lb.) of good honey. Stir well.

This quantity is good for two treatments or two hives. If you have only one hive, keep the second jar in refrigerator until used, but warm up to room temperature before you give it to the bees.

This treat can be given early spring until late summer every one or two months.



For building up nucs, splits, swarms or packages

Quantity is for two treatments - you need two 1-quart jars

Same recipe as above, but this time, add 4 cups (2 lbs.) of good honey.

Feed as often as the colony takes up the tea (for about 2 weeks), longer in inclement weather, shorter if they have enough forage to gather in nature.

Observation is very important: if the tea sits for days and is not taken by the bees, then either they don't need it or the tea has turned sour. This happens quickly in warm weather.

For fall feeding

This is only needed if the colony was not able to build up enough stores for the winter!

At this time you want to have a heavy syrup so that the bees don't have to work so much evaporating the water content of the tea; the feeding at this point has to go quick.

If you have one colony you can probably afford a recipe with honey only, (see above), but if you have too many hives to feed, for example after a bad summer (severe drought or too much rain), then you may have to add some sugar. Sugar is not good for the bees, but the question is always "do I want to let them starve to death or do I want to help them survive the winter". If you are experienced enough you may want to combine 2 hives; out of 2 weak you make one strong. You will have to decide at this point. Adding the healing tea to the sugar is helpful for digestion.

Organic sugar is good, preferably white, because the brown sugar or sucanat contains too many organic compounds, which are hard for the bees to digest.

You will have to choose the quantity you need to prepare depending on the number of hives to be treated.

Here is how you do it:

- fill a container with the desired quantity of sugar; for example, 5 lbs. of sugar will give you about 2 1/2 quarts of syrup
- make a mark on the container (in your mind or with a piece of tape outside) and add the hot tea exactly to this level
- stir vigorously
- let cool to lukewarm temperature
- add 5 to 10% of good honey, it adds complex sugars to the simple ones
- add a pinch of good salt (not iodized!), this aids the digestion of the sugar

Note: At this point of time we consider the Honeybee to be in a life-threatening situation. Like the patient in the emergency room, she needs care, attention and love. Enjoy preparing the tea and treating your bees.

If you don't have all the above-mentioned herbs, don't worry; the first three are the most important. You can also purchase the ready mixture on our webpage.