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ou know that slightly rushed, panicked feeling that characterises most of our lives? It is no excuse. Bees have it too, in fact they live to be only six or seven weeks old. What they achieve in so little time is remarkable. Through their masterful pollination skills and their sexy little dances, they are responsible for over one third of all the food we eat. We ought to raise a toast to the incredible productivity of the honeybee.

Bee wings stroke astoundingly fast, about 200 beats per second, thus producing their legendary, jazzy buzz. They spend their time dancing, communicating, sharing, scouting and sucking it all in. After a day's work they wiggle home, heavy with treasure — pollen and nectar from all sorts of extraordinary flowers from around the 'hood. They then head on home to that fascinating structure we call the hive; that hyper-engineered, thoughtfully hexagonal structure that has captured so many of our imaginations.

Bees are quite particular about their space, their dwelling. The hive is made up internally of beeswax cells, honeycomb that contains the larvae, honey and pollen. The true geometry is perhaps too technical to get into here, but let it be said that any decor aficionado would do well to study the interior design of a bee colony. The fact that these saccharine temples have been artificially assembled by curious humans is somehow not yet icky. The art of beekeeping, which dates back at least 4 500 years, brings incredible joy to many and has in fact protected the bee species.

Beehive placement is very specific, not just because you want to avoid upsetting the neighbours, but because you need to avoid upsetting the bees. The hive's situation determines the unique flavour of the honey produced. It needs to be near food and water, sheltered but with lots of light — bees love the sun — and one needs to consider the flight path in and out of the hive.

Our beekeeping story started with a fascinating visit to the Babylonstoren Bee Hotel. Kitted out with the essential beekeeping paraphernalia — a protective veil, gloves, smoker and hive tools — we were introduced to the colony of Cape Honey Bees that traverse the illustrious eight-acre gardens. The wholesome honey that is produced from Babylonstoren has its very own flavour profile, texture and taste; a bouquet of the countless plant species in the area.

Whether served as a liquid, creamed or in the comb, this honey is wonderful stuff. It contains many beneficial minerals and vitamins and has antibacterial and antioxidant properties. It speeds the healing process and combats infections. And it never spoils. Now how's that for a magical potion?

Join DECO and Maranda Engelbrecht, the epicurean sorcerer, as we cook up a swarm.

The Bee's KNEES

Let's talk about cooking with an enchanted ingredient, an elixir. This liquid gold is made from the nectar of a thousand flowers and the work of over 10 000 perfectly choreographed little bees. Let's make magic

PHOTOGRAPHS **ADEL FERREIRA** PRODUCTION, RECIPES AND STYLING **MARANDA ENGELBRECHT** SHOT ON LOCATION **BABYLONSTOREN** TEXT **BIELLE BELLINGHAM**



A·PI·CUL·TURE *'āpi,kəlCHər/*
 TECHNICAL TERM FOR **BEEKEEPING**

BAKED RHUBARB WITH FIG, AMARETTO AND TOASTED HONEY ORGANIC OATS

serves 2-4

- 4 stalks rhubarb
- 60ml raw honey
- 30ml melted butter
- 2 ripe figs
- 250g rolled oats
- 5ml cinnamon
- 50g butter
- 90ml raw honey
- pinch of salt
- 90ml Amaretto
- 250ml double thick yoghurt
- 90ml honey
- a piece of fresh honeycomb
- 150g raspberries

Preheat the oven to 160°C. Slice the rhubarb into large pieces and place in a piece of tinfoil with the two whole figs. Drizzle with raw honey and butter. Fold the tinfoil to close and place on an oven tray. Bake in the oven for 10 to 15 minutes or until just soft. Remove and keep warm.

Use a large saucepan and toast the oats with cinnamon, butter and 90ml raw honey over a low heat, until the oats start to caramelize. Add a pinch of salt and more honey if necessary.

Plate the rhubarb, fig and some oats. Drizzle with the cooking juices, Amaretto and honey. Garnish with a thin slice of honeycomb and raspberries. Serve with yoghurt on the side.



THE KEEPING OF BEES IS LIKE THE DIRECTION OF SUNBEAMS

– HENRY DAVID THOREAU

FIG LEAF IMPRINTED GOATS CHEESE WITH ROSE AND HONEY DRIZZLE

serves 4-6

- 120ml honey**
- 5ml rosewater**
- tiny drop of pink food colouring**

- 400g chevin or soft goats cheese**
- 2-4 large fig leaves**

- 4 fresh figs**
- 60ml honey**
- 10g thyme**
- 10ml toasted sesame seeds**

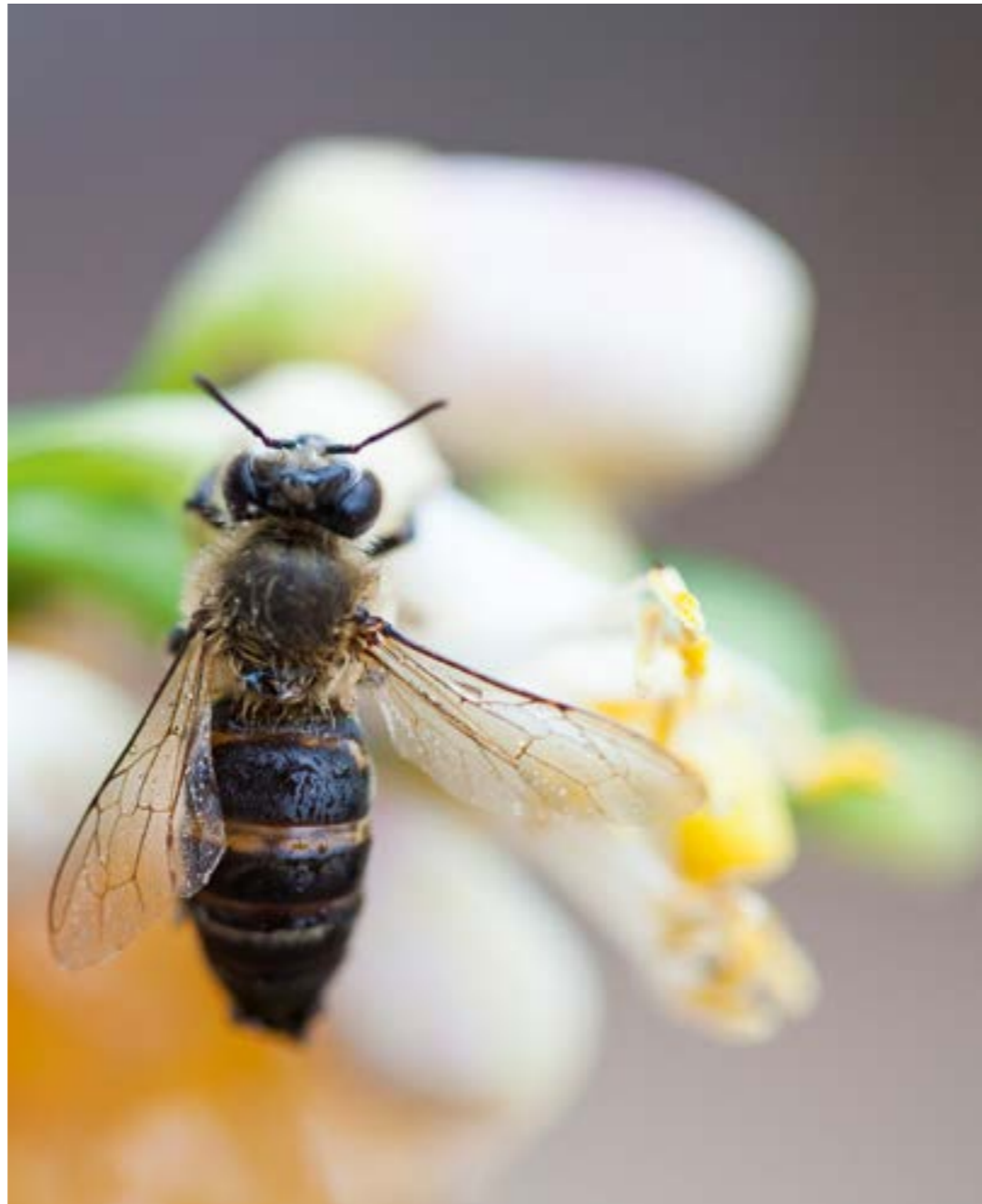
For the rose and honey syrup, combine honey, rosewater and food colouring.

With the palm of your hands, press the goats cheese down onto a fig leaf. Use the second leaf to imprint the vein pattern onto the cheese by pressing the leaf onto it. Carefully pull the leaf away.

Place the extra leaves and the figs next to the cheese. Drizzle the honey and rose syrup and sprinkle with thyme and sesame seeds. Drizzle the rest of the honey and serve with crackers or warm bread.

Another idea:

You can use any edible leaf like spinach, cabbage or vine leaves; but make sure they are washed and pesticide free.



SPICY HONEY AND ROOIBOS GRANITA WITH GIN FIZZ AND LOTUS LEAF STRAW

serves 4-6 glasses

- 1l strong rooibos tea**
- 300ml honey**
- 2 juniper berries**
- 2 star anise**
- 2 white pepper corns**

Simmer the tea, honey, juniper berries, star anise and white pepper corns for 10 minutes. Remove and strain through a cloth. Add 60ml lemon juice and the grated rind of 1 lemon and place in the freezer. When the icicles start to form loosen the mixture with a fork. Place back in freezer and loosen again after 2 hours. Freeze once more, loosening again before use.

- 60ml lemon juice**
- grated rind of 1 lemon**

Add a tot of gin to each glass. Spoon the granita, to fill the whole glass, and fill with tonic water. Wash the stem of a lotus leaf and cut into straws. Garnish with a slice of orange or lemon.

- 1 stem of lotus leaf**
- 1 orange**
- gin**
- tonic water**

Another idea:
For the Rooibis Granita, follow the recipe as above and add: 400ml crushed strawberries, raspberries or blackberries, or 400ml grated pineapple, or 400ml grapefruit juice after 2 hours. Freeze and loosen again before use.

FACT: *HONEY IS CHOLESTEROL AND FAT FREE*



BAKING IDEA: *WHEN SUGAR IS REPLACED WITH HONEY, REDUCE THE BAKING TEMPERATURE BY 25°C, DECREASE THE LIQUID BY 10 PERCENT AND ADD A PINCH OF BAKING POWDER TO YOUR RECIPE*

HONEY BUTTER SANDWICH WITH CANDY-STRIPED BEETROOT

- 500ml raw honey**
- fresh slices of crusty bread**
- 1 candy-stripe beetroot, washed and sliced thinly**
- a piece of honeycomb**
- Malden salt**

Add the honey into a bowl and whisk with an electric beater until thick and creamy. Smear the bread with honey butter and top with beetroot and a piece of sliced honeycomb. Sprinkle with a little salt.

Another idea:
For flavoured honey butter use the same recipe as above and add 60ml peanut butter or 90ml lemon curd or 100g melted white chocolate (cooled down) or 100g double thick yoghurt.



Honeycomb R24, Melissa's The Food Shop
Wooden honey spoon R50, Arabesque

Healey's slow matured cheddar R120, Saucisse Boutique Deli

Collins Beekeeper's Bible R809, Exclusive Books

Baked pear bread R30, Babylonstoren

White plate R39, Weylandts

Raw honeycomb R75, Mac's Honey.

Birkenhead honey blonde R38, Wine at the Mill

Extra virgin olive oil R115, Babylonstoren

Nougat R35, Ma Mere Maison
Finger bowl R120, Clementina

Belnori chevre plain R60, Saucisse Boutique Deli
Slab plates R190, Clementina

Wooden spoon R25, Arabesque

Mvstard Cognac and Honey R180, Hemelhuijs

Honey R120, Ma Mere Maison
Finger bowl R120, Clementina

HONEY AND TAHINI DRESSING WITH FRESH MINT

makes about 350ml

- 1 small onion
- 125ml extra virgin olive oil
- 100ml honey
- 60ml lemon juice
- 60ml tahini
- 15g fresh mint
- salt and pepper to taste

Combine all of the ingredients in a food processor. Use with your favourite salad as a dressing.

THIS PAGE PHOTOGRAPH: DIRK PIETERS