

# Buzzing about honey



ALISON WORTH

## to market

Honey is one of the oldest known sweeteners.

It has been an essential part of our diet since time began and there is increased interest in its culinary and health properties.

Not only delicious to eat, honey is hailed for its medicinal properties – it is anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-fungal and packed with highly valuable nutrients.

It is considered a “complete food” with a complex balance of proteins, enzymes and carbohydrates.

In the Waikato, the honey business is buzzing.

Horsham Downs couple Stephanie and Martin Lynch run Vitality Bee Products, selling honey at local farmers' markets.

For Martin, bees have always been part of his life. His father had three hives at their home in Ohinewai, and Martin developed a passion for it as a teenager, taking over the hives after his father died.

From a hobby, and just three hives, a business has developed and the couple now have about 100 hives. The majority are at Marokopa, near Waitomo, where bees collect nectar and pollen from surrounding native trees (manuka, rewarewa and heketara) and pasture flowers, producing four distinct honey varieties with flavours including toffee, tangy butter and pepper.

“All of our honeys have a unique flavour to them,” says Martin. “Our manuka honey has a much more subtle flowery flavour and is a light caramel colour rather than the traditional dark and strong type you see in supermarkets.”

Each hive produces between 20kg and 60kg of honey per year, much of which is retained as winter food for the bees. The Lynches say it is healthier for bees to eat their own honey and pollen during winter rather than supplement their diet with sugar syrup. They believe it also makes bees less susceptible to parasites, viruses and illnesses, allowing them to produce more nutrient-dense and flavoursome honey.

Martin has admiration for the industrious insects. “Bees are highly resilient creatures and a delight to work with,” he says.

The work, which involves much travel, is also rewarding. “Visiting remote and beautiful areas in the Waikato while looking after our bees is a joy,” says Martin. “Nothing beats the taste and aroma of honey from freshly waxed frames on a warm summer's day.”

Vitality is a family enterprise, with Stephanie's sister Carolyn Cittadini helping the couple sell honey at market. The wider family help out during busy times, packing products, and their love for bees has extended to the next generation. Children Daniel, 7, and Matthew, 5, enjoy



Sweet treat: Martin Lynch from Vitality Bee Products offers Bryan Smith and Ruby honey at the Hamilton Farmers' Market.

Photo: CHRIS HILLOCK

spending time with their father when out tending to hives, and Daniel – who has his own mini beekeeper's suit – wants his own hive this year and dreams of making his own honey.

The Lynches choose to sell the bulk of their honey at local farmers' markets as they enjoy explaining the different qualities and flavours directly with customers.

They have just launched several new honeys including Marokopa Summer and Four Brothers Reserve.

■ Vitality Bee Products attend Cambridge Farmers' Market every other Saturday and Hamilton Farmers' Market every Sunday. Both markets run from 8am to noon. For more information see [vitalityonline.co.nz](http://vitalityonline.co.nz)

### LEMON HONEY DRIZZLE CAKE

250g butter  
1 cup sugar  
4 eggs (free-range, at room temperature and beaten)  
2 cups flour, sifted  
3 tsp baking powder  
3 lemons, juice and zest  
1 tsp vanilla essence  
¼ cup honey  
½ cup lemon juice  
¼ cup sugar

■ Preheat the oven to 180 degrees Celsius. Cream butter and 1 cup of sugar together, then add the beaten eggs gradually until well combined. Add the three juiced lemons and their zest then fold in the flour and baking powder. Transfer to a greased loaf tin and bake until golden brown and cooked – about 40 minutes.

### HONEY AS MEDICINE

**For sore throats, coughs and colds:** Warm three tablespoons of honey with three small sprigs of fresh thyme in a bowl over some boiling water. Do not allow the temperature to exceed 40 degrees Celsius – high temperatures will begin to destroy the goodness. Allow the thyme to infuse with the honey for about five minutes. Take one teaspoon three times a day, including just before bed. This is good for children with coughs and night coughing.

**For cuts and grazes:** Clean



All rounder: Honey has many uses in the medicine cabinet and the kitchen.

the affected area with warm water, dry well then slather on honey straight from the jar. Cover with a plaster or dressing and allow the honey to work as

a natural antiseptic and skin repairer.

### HONEY IN FOOD

There are a variety of fantastic ways to use honey in food, from sweet to savoury dishes. A zesty lemon cake can be drizzled with a sweet honey sauce – perfect for serving as a dessert or afternoon tea treat.

For a savoury option, try the versatile honey-based sweet and sour glaze, delicious with chicken or fish. Don't buy pre-made supermarket marinade, this is so much better, and better for you.

■ For the drizzle, warm the honey and ½ cup of lemon juice in a pot until dissolved together. Pour over the hot cake then sprinkle with the remaining sugar. Allow to cool in the tin before slicing and serving with lemon honey and/or yoghurt.

### HONEY, LIME & GINGER GLAZE

4 Tbsp honey  
¼ cup lime juice  
grated zest of 1 lime  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
2 tbsp grated fresh ginger  
3 Tbsp toasted sesame oil  
3 Tbsp soy sauce

■ Mix all ingredients together and use as a marinade on chicken or fish. Leave on for 30-60 minutes to allow flavours to infuse, storing in the fridge while you prepare vegetables, salad or other side dish.

■ For more intense flavour, brush on extra glaze during cooking, add some freshly chopped red or green chilli for a spicy kick (optional).

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