

Food & Drink



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Blog: thelocalfoodie.wordpress.com

Becky Alexander is on the hunt for the finest local produce

Honey comes home with Copley

Looking for local honey can be a bit of a treasure hunt. It only appears at certain times of the year, and only when local bees have been feeling productive.

Most local honey is eaten by the beekeepers and their friends, and the beekeepers only sell when they have enough to spare. This year looks like it will have been a good year for bees as I have spotted jars of locally sourced honey popping up in quite a few of our independent shops.

Copley & Buckley honey will be familiar to anyone who shops at Carpenter's Nursery, Sandridge, or at the Artisan Bakery (was 'Ushers') in the Quadrant, Marshalswick, where there is often a jar or two placed on top of the counter. Look out, too, for it at Charlie's coffee van at St Albans station - Charlie offers it to go with the loose-leaf teas - lucky commuters.

For Charlie, "there's no contest"; this is always her preferred choice.

Jay's deli in Southdown is, I think, the nearest source to Harpenden (and is a very good supplier of local food at all times of the year). You can also find local honey at John Pender's butcher's shop by the stables in Sandridge and Darby's store in the centre of Sandridge.

Gardens of the Rose will also be selling local honey in their shop this summer. I spotted honey earlier this year at The Saddlery Café, just off Cooper's Green Lane, produced by Luke Adams. Selling for £5-7 a jar, they had a few jars for sale and hoped supplies would continue into June and July.

The Courtyard Café, Hatfield Road has just taken a small supply of Sandridge honey (£5).

Local, raw honey is rather magical. Did you know it takes around a million flower visits to produce just one jar of honey, and a worker bee will collect around a teaspoonful in its short life over the summer (around six weeks); it makes £5 a jar look extremely good value. The taste, appearance,

aroma and texture of honey will depend on what the bees have been foraging on. The honey will vary from location to location, hive to hive and season to season, unless blended as in commercial honey production.

Local, raw, unheated honey is rare and is the least processed honey - it is in effect exactly what comes out of the comb.

We've been eating honey and using it to sweeten food and drinks for centuries; there is a recipe book *De Re Coquinaria* ('On Cookery') by Apicus, dating to Roman times that writes about honey. It is the original 'superfood', containing easily digestible sugars, proteins, minerals, vitamins, anti-oxidants and amino acids, as well as pollen, which sugar just can't compete with.

Honey can be used in almost any recipe as a sugar substitute, but adjustments need to be made as honey is sweeter than sugar, contains liquid and has a flavour that may or may not enhance the food.

It also freezes at a lower temperature (important to know for sorbets and ice-cream). Or you can keep it simple and eat it spread on toast, or have a spoonful for breakfast.

As hayfever season is now upon us, many people are convinced that you might find eating a spoonful a day of local honey over the course of the year alleviates symptoms in the hayfever, although Andrew explained that starting well before you develop symptoms would be preferable!

I spoke to Andrew Copley of Copley & Buckley honey and member of the St Albans Beekeeper's Association. Andrew told me that the association now has over 100 members, drawn from in and around St Albans, Harpenden, Sandridge, Wheathampstead and Hemel. It was formed in 1942 and membership is £40. If any readers want to know more about beekeeping, they are welcome to contact SABKAabka. SABKAabka may run taster days later this year



■ Sandridge honey

as courses are currently full in the future, and will keep a contact list of names of those interested (sabka.org).



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For more information please contact **Sarah Scott-Foster** on **01438 866023** or email

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Deadline for entries is **Friday 6th June at 5pm**

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