

WESTCHESTER DINING | HONEY

Locally Grown Food, From Backyard Hive



Kelly Shimoda for The New York Times

REVIEW A student, Hilary Tucker of Dobbs Ferry, inspecting a hive, above.

By EMILY DeNITTO

Published: July 29, 2011

IT'S a hot July day at Peter Pratt's Inn in Yorktown Heights and the [honeybees](#) are, well, busy. Standing here in full bee-protection regalia, with Craig Purdy, a co-owner of [Peter Pratt's](#) and the [Ümami](#) Café in Croton-on-Hudson, I am about to see where honey comes from.

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Golden pollen covering their back legs, the bees buzz around the frame I've pulled out of the restaurant's apiary, working in the wax, loose nectar and sticky propolis that are the fruits of their labor. Mr. Purdy billows

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Kelly Shimoda for The New York Times
The instructor, D. J. Haverkamp, dares to do without the head protection.

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Kelly Shimoda for The New York Times
The John Jay Homestead's popular beekeeping class.

smoke toward the hive to keep the bees from paying attention to us.

“They’re meditative to watch,” he said. “It slows you down to tend honeybees.”

More and more people in this area seem to be looking for just that kind of calm. No one keeps records on how many beekeepers there are in Westchester County, but buffs conservatively estimate the number at 500. Stores increasingly offer locally produced honey, restaurants are cooking with it and scores of county residents are setting up hives in their backyards to create their own versions of it.

“When I started 13 years ago, no one was doing it,” said Margaret von der Meden, who tends four hives at [Hilltop Hanover Farm](#) in Yorktown, where several local brands are sold. “Today, people are beekeeping all over the

place.”

Ms. Von der Meden belongs to a new club in Croton with over 30 people. She recently started producing a line of bee-related creams, [Beehive Goods](#), sold online.

Part of the growing interest in beekeeping can be traced to publicity over what scientists refer to as [colony collapse disorder](#), a mysterious killer that is causing large-scale deaths in the honeybee population. Honeybees pollinate most crops we depend on and are thus critical to our food supply.

“That’s the big trigger,” said D. J. Haverkamp, who runs [Bedford Bee Honeybee Service](#), a consulting firm that provides beekeeping services similar to a pool service. “People want to do something about the crisis.”

Mr. Haverkamp brings the bees to people’s homes in May, returns every two weeks for maintenance, then harvests the honey in August, guaranteeing 10 pounds in 12-ounce containers. After the harvest, he carries the bees back to his Bedford operation and winterizes them. He has about 40 clients with 70 hives.

“I’ve had to turn people away,” Mr. Haverkamp said. “Even though I only accept clients 30 minutes from my base, the demand is greater than my resources.”

The rise in appreciation of locally grown food has contributed to that demand. [Table Local Market](#) in Bedford Hills carries several brands of local honey, and the store uses it in its baked goods and iced tea.

“It’s extraordinary wildflower honey, and it sells out quickly after we get it,” said Karen



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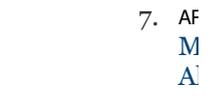


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Johnston, an employee. “Our customers come in asking for it.”

Honey, which contains small amounts of local pollen, is said to be a natural inoculation against seasonal allergies.

“People have been using honey this way for millennia,” said Christine Lehner, a co-owner of [Let It Bee Honey](#).

The operation started with one hive in Hastings-on-Hudson in 2005 and now has hives in Bedford, Irvington and Rye and at [Lyndhurst](#), the National Trust property in Tarrytown.

The honey is sold at stores in the area including [DeCicco Family Markets](#) in Ardsley and Mint Premium Foods in Tarrytown, as well as at the Hastings farmers’ market.

“Last year we produced almost 1,000 pounds — and it sold out quickly,” Ms. Lehner said.

It’s fairly easy and, at roughly \$250, not too expensive to set up a hive and buy the basic equipment necessary to become a beekeeper, like a smoker and a suit and veil. A three-pound package that contains about 10,000 bees costs about \$80.

[John Jay Homestead State Historic Site](#) in Katonah started a workshop series on beginning beekeeping in April led by Mr. Haverkamp that will run through November. There are 20 spaces for each workshop, and the series quickly sold out.

As a historical site, the homestead is well positioned to express beekeeping’s link to the past. “John Jay kept bees to pollinate his crops,” said Heather Iannucci, manager of the homestead. “Bringing bees back here is a return to the authenticity of the place.”

At Peter Pratt’s, the honeybees can be seen flying out into the meadow, looking for pollen, then returning to the hive. The honey harvested by Mr. Purdy and Jonathan Pratt, his business partner — about 100 pounds last year — will be used in their restaurants in such diverse products as vinaigrettes, gelato and pizza dough. They also offer one-pound jars for \$8.50.

Honey always tastes like the plants in the area of the hive, and I glance out at the forest around the restaurant as Mr. Purdy describes his honey’s taste.

“It’s woody, raw — a real miel de forêt flavor,” he said. “It’s absolutely delicious.”

Bedford Bee Honeybee Service is at [bedfordbee.com](#); Backyard Beekeepers, a club based in Weston, Conn., with many Westchester members, is at [backyardbeekeepers.com](#)

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:



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Correction: August 7, 2011

An article about beekeeping in some editions last Sunday misstated the number of bees that can be purchased for about \$80. That price, or slightly more, is the typical payment for a three-pound package that contains about 10,000 bees, not 200.

A version of this article appeared in print on July 31, 2011, on page WE10 of the New York edition with the headline: Locally Grown Food, From Backyard Hive.

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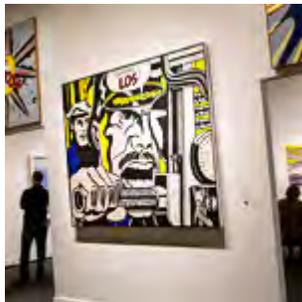
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