

# The Back is

# LOCAL HONEY IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE

BY DOMINIQUE PAUL

Last Christmas I was gifted a jar of honey from Francolin Farm, a boutique organic farm and apiary in Leiper's Fork. I'd tasted honey before, of course, mostly just the kind you buy at the grocery store that comes in a plastic bottle shaped like a bear. But this honey from Francolin Farm was nothing like that. Rich and savory with a creamy consistency and a nuance of flavors I didn't know existed. It felt like I was seeing color for the first time. I found myself returning to the cupboard again and again, eating the honey by the spoonful, sometimes with a sprinkle of pink Himalayan Sea salt on top. You can imagine my despair when I finished the jar and learned I'd have to wait until late summer to get another fix.

In March, as the weather warmed, I braced myself for the upcoming allergy season. Except this year, I experienced no symptoms. By June, I realized I was in the clear and began to wonder why I'd been spared. Could it have been the honey? A quick consultation with Dr. Google revealed that consuming raw honey containing pollen and nectar builds the immune system against allergies caused by that same pollen, similar to a vaccine. Basically, by eating raw honey in winter, you're adapting your body to what's coming in spring. Pretty cool, huh?

I soon learned that in addition to helping with seasonal allergies, raw local honey has a host of other benefits:

**GOOD SOURCE OF  
ANTIOXIDANTS AND  
ANTI-INFLAMMATORY  
POLYPHENOLS**

**CONTAINS VITAMINS  
AND MINERALS SUCH  
AS CALCIUM, MAGNESIUM  
AND ZINC**

**HAS ANTIBACTERIAL AND  
ANTIFUNGAL PROPERTIES**

**AIDS IN WOUND HEALING**

**CONTAINS PHYTONUTRIENTS  
PACKED WITH IMMUNE  
BOOSTING AND ANTICANCER  
PROPERTIES**

**HELPS WITH DIGESTIVE  
ISSUES THANKS TO  
BENEFICIAL PREBIOTICS**

**SOOTHES SORE THROATS**

**HAS COGNITIVE BENEFITS  
DUE TO ITS ABILITY TO  
COUNTER INFLAMMATION  
IN THE HIPPOCAMPUS**

Now that I was a card-carrying member of the honey cult I wanted to know more. Hadn't I heard that the bee population was declining? Did I need to put hives in my backyard to help save the bees and feed my new addiction?

In the early aughts, the prevailing narrative was that the bees were in peril because around 2006, beekeepers began reporting huge losses of honey bee colonies. The biggest factor being the Varroa mite, an invasive, parasitic mite from China that was destroying hives. As beekeepers were able to figure out ways to keep the pests at bay, bees flourished once again. And that's a good thing because, according to scientists, if bees disappeared off the face of the earth, man would only survive approximately four years. It's amazing to think how closely our fates are tied with a tiny stinging insect. We have good reason to want to keep these little guys alive.

Today, there are likely more honey bees on the planet than there have ever been in history, and backyard beekeeping is a thriving industry. But beekeepers Steven Abernathy and Claire Papevies of Greenwood Honey Co. in Nashville say that keeping hives in your backyard isn't the only way to help the bees. "Buying bees isn't the answer because, without an abundance of resources, bees compete with other pollinators in the area for limited sources of nectar and pollen," says Steven. "Planting native pollinator plants is one of the best ways you can help the bees."

It turns out bees prefer to stay within a three mile zone from their hive, but will go as far as six miles to find food if they have to. Honey is a source of fuel for bees, so the further they have to travel, the less honey they make. "Each hive needs around two to four acres of resources to thrive," says Claire. Planting native pollinator plants is especially important because of the abundance of ultra-green manicured lawns in our area. "Stop planting fescue, and start planting flowers," urges Steven. "Letting the clover bloom in your lawn is also great for bees and other pollinators."

Steven and Claire are on the board of the Nashville Area Beekeepers Association (NABA) and began their beekeeping and honey making journey in their backyard in East Nashville in 2019. They then built a rooftop apiary for The Turnip Truck in East Nash and are also the beekeepers for Leiper's Fork Distillery, Patina Meadow and fifty other residential hives in our area. Recently, they built the hives for Meadowbrook Farms, an organic and regenerative farm near Beechwood Hall.

After each harvest, Steven and Claire host a pop-up event where folks can sample fresh honey and learn about the various tasting notes. "Like wine, raw honey has its own unique flavors and characteristics. And each hive produces its own unique batch of honey," says Steven, who is working towards his Honey Sommelier Certification with Claire. With notes like marshmallow, caramel, citrus, geranium and fresh pear to name just a few, Steven says no two hives' honey tastes the same - even the ones located on the same property.

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"It's the thing that made me fall in love with bees," he says, referring to each hives' ability to craft a bespoke product. "The bees are communicating with each other where they're finding nectar sources, and with a waggle dance they will communicate that they found, say, an abundance of milkweed, and so the forager bees will go out and find more of that." Steven and Claire keep the integrity of each hive's product in tact by never mixing honey together from different hives. "Nectar ratios are unique to each hive based on what resources are available. And it's what makes the honey taste unique."



Photo by:  
Kate Dearman

Lucky for us, there is an abundance of raw honey available in our area. "But you don't need to only eat honey from a mile up the road for it to be considered local. Middle Tennessee is zone 7b, so any honey from zone 7b will offer the same benefits to someone who lives in that zone," says Steven, who recommends consuming honey from various pollen sources. Zone 7b stretches through our area and into Kentucky, Georgia, Central Texas and the Carolinas.

But, even if you don't like honey, or happen to be allergic to it, planting for non-honey bees and pollinators is still essential. Wild bees are considered incredibly important, especially for home gardens and crops that honey bees can't pollinate such as tomatoes, eggplants and peppers. Claire adds, "The best thing any of us can do, not only for the environment but for ourselves as a species, is to help pollinators thrive. When bees have enough resources, they are able to make enough honey for themselves to survive, and humans can enjoy the excess. Honey is a delicacy that can only be enjoyed when there is enough for both of us."

## *Tips for helping pollinators*

**PLANT A VARIETY OF PLANTS** so your garden blooms from spring through fall. Consider using Roundstone Seed's *Honey Bee Specialty Pollinator Mix*.

**STOP USING PESTICIDES.** When honey bees encounter pesticides they can take that poison back to their hive and kill their entire colony (if they make it back to the hive at all).

**START VIEWING WEEDS AS FLOWERS.** Allow dandelions and clover to thrive on your lawn.

**PLANT MILKWEED.** This native plant aids bees and other pollinators, including the Monarch Butterfly. To view the full list of native plants suggested by NABA, visit [yourwilliamson.com](http://yourwilliamson.com)

**PLANT NON-NATIVE PLANTS THAT ATTRACT POLLINATORS** including Tulips, Catmint, Butterfly Bush, Lantana, Lavender, Russian Sage, Snapdragons and Sedum.

**SUPPORT LOCAL NURSERIES THAT SPECIALIZE IN NATIVE PLANTS** like Wonder Gift & Garden Nursery in Kingston Springs and Bluebird Springs Farm in Shelbyville.



# Local Honey Guide

## LEIPER'S FORK DISTILLERY

BEEKEEPERS: Greenwood Honey Co.

NECTAR SOURCE: Polyfloral

TASTING NOTES:

- Hive "Gayle": Herbaceous floral & fruit notes of geranium and fresh pear
- Hive "Locke": Warm buttery berry notes of black currant, fresh melon and a hint of rose

WHERE TO BUY: Leiper's Fork Distillery Gift Store, Leiper's Fork

## PATINA MEADOW

BEEKEEPERS: Greenwood Honey Co.

NECTAR SOURCE: Polyfloral

TASTING NOTES:

- Hive "Clementine": Dried fruit, apricot with a hint of berry, cherry on the front end with a warm nutty finish
- Hive "Daisy": Woody and warm notes of caramel brown sugar and marshmallow with candied fruit and a hint of melon on the finish

WHERE TO BUY: Patina Home & Garden, Leiper's Fork

## THE TURNIP TRUCK

BEEKEEPERS: Greenwood Honey Co.

NECTAR SOURCE: Polyfloral

TASTING NOTES: Rose and jasmine with a hint of citrus zest and candied peel (Hive "Basil")

WHERE TO BUY: The Turnip Truck Grocery Store, East Nashville

## GREENWOOD AVE.

BEEKEEPERS: Greenwood Honey Co.

NECTAR SOURCE: Polyfloral

TASTING NOTES: Warm confectionary vanilla with an orange citrus finish (Hive "Nugget")

WHERE TO BUY: Kinda Collected in East Nashville or visit [greenwoodhoneyco.com](http://greenwoodhoneyco.com)

## MORNING GLORY ORCHARD

BEEKEEPERS: O'Brien Family

NECTAR SOURCES: Apple, peach, and pear trees, flowering gardens

TASTING NOTES: Dark and rich with a mild fruit ending

WHERE TO BUY: 7690 Nolensville Road in Nolensville, The Factory Farmers Market and Crieve Hall Farmers Market

## FRANCOLIN FARM

BEEKEEPER: Jay Williams

NECTAR SOURCES: Tulip Poplar, Goldenrod, Black Locust, and over 100 varieties of produce and native flowers, including blackberries and red clover

TASTING NOTES: Buttery, with notes of jasmine, pear, and a mild hint of citrus with a touch of spice

WHERE TO BUY: [francolinfarm.com](http://francolinfarm.com)

## SOUTHALL FARM & INN

BEEKEEPER: Jay Williams

NECTAR SOURCES: Catalpa, Apple Blossom, Basswood and over thirty-five acres of native perennial flowers

TASTING NOTES: Light and smooth with notes of pear, green apple and jasmine with a spicy finish

WHERE TO BUY: Southall Farm Stand, Franklin