

Wild flower honey ice cream

Serves: 8 (ish)

Preparation time: 15 mins + chilling + freezing

Ingredients:

475 ml (2 cups) double cream

240 ml (1 cup) whole milk

6 large egg yolks

120 ml (½ cup) wild flower honey (runny or soft, not hard)

good pinch salt

1 tsp real vanilla essence (or less)



Method:

1. Bring cream and milk to almost boiling and quickly take off heat.
2. Whisk together honey and yolks briefly, just until fully combined.
3. Add a ladle of the cream to the yolks and whisk. (This is 'tempering' the yolks – raising their temperature so they can be combined with the rest of the hot liquid without curdling.) Pour yolks into pan of cream and combine.
4. Over a low heat keep stirring the custard with a wooden spoon until it thickens slightly. Scrape the spoon over the base of the pan as you go to make sure the custard at the bottom doesn't over-cook. It is ready when it coats the back of the spoon (ie doesn't immediately run off). Approx 5 mins. Take care not to get the custard too hot or the yolks will curdle. Eggs curdle at c.81 C (177 F), ie well before boiling point. If the custard begins to curdle you may be able to save it by immediately pouring it out into a bowl and whisking vigorously. (So keep a bowl and whisk handy.)
5. Remove from heat and add the vanilla and salt to taste.
6. Cool the custard to room temperature and then chill overnight in the fridge.
7. Freeze using an ice cream maker.

I made this ice cream having had something similar at Chez Panisse (a famous Berkeley restaurant). There it was served with roasted figs - delicious. At home we had it with Carlo's Florentine Apple Cake – equally delicious. You should use the nicest honey you can find. If yours is too hard and crystalline to mix easily with the yolks, first warm the jar in a pan of hot water. The honey keeps the ice cream soft, which means you can serve it directly from the freezer. The honey also prolongs the life of the ice cream, so you can keep it for several weeks. But you won't want to.

Honey facts:

- We all know that bees make honey from nectar. But did you know that they ingest and regurgitate the nectar several times before laying it in the honeycomb? Or that they use their little wings to fan the honeycomb to evaporate enough moisture from the honey so that it cannot ferment?
- Honey has so much sugar and so little moisture that you can keep it your whole life without it going off. The sugar kills most bacteria and the lack of moisture prevents natural yeasts from reproducing. Someone once found a 2000-year-old pot of honey in an Egyptian tomb and said it tasted great.
- However, the low level of bacteria still remaining in honey is a potential danger for infants. Bees can pick up *botulinum* spores, which may cause infant botulism in children under the age of one.
- 'Mad honey' can be produced if the bees have visited rhododendrons, azaleas or mountain laurels. It is psychoactive and poisonous to humans due to the presence of *grayanotoxin*. The effects of 'mad honey' have been reported for centuries, but it is very rare.
- Honey bees must gather nectar from two million flowers to make one pound of honey. One bee would therefore have to fly c. 90,000 miles - 3 times round the world - to make one pound of honey. Which is why the average honey bee will only make one twelfth of a teaspoon of honey in its lifetime.
- So when you eat this ice cream you can thank the 288 honey bees who helped you make it.
- Honey is said to be healthier for us to eat than refined sugar as it contains more fructose and glucose (and less sucrose) and also a handful of other useful enzymes, vitamins and minerals. It also tastes better.
- Apparently, Democritus (460-370 BC), a Greek philosopher and physician, chose a diet rich in honey and lived until he was 90 years old – a very ripe old age in those days. Which means it's good to eat lots and lots of this honey ice cream...