

Life / Sourced

Sourced: Ring in a sweet Rosh Hashanah with Jewish honey

Jewish beekeeper tends to hives as mission for “Tikkun Olam” — to repair the world — and get other local Jews to join her.



NICK KOZAK / TORONTO STAR

Jewish beekeeper Sabrina Malach inspects a bee-laden super at the tiny Jewish apiary at Bela farm in Hillsburgh, Ontario.

By: **Michele Henry** Staff reporter, Published on Wed Sep 24 2014

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Morning sun strikes about a dozen Mason jars in the back of her Toyota Yaris, making their liquid shine like gold.

This honey is what’s left of about 150 pounds cultivated in a tiny, Jewish apiary about an hour’s drive west of the city — probably the only one of its sort in Canada.

It’s not quite enough to help Toronto’s entire Jewish community usher in a sweet new year, so this “precious” product has been given away to a lucky few just in time for Rosh Hashanah. The Jewish New Year begins Wednesday at sundown.

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While there's a growing Jewish beekeeping movement south of the border, Toronto's urban Jews are just warming up to such "hands-on" food.

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On a recent sunny morning, Malach travels to the apiary to check on her bees just days after the big extraction.

But before kitting up, she kneels on the porch of the small, grey barn at Bela Farm, a lush property in Hillsburgh, Ontario. The hives are nestled close by in a field of wild flowers.

Malach holds a spent super up to the light and stares at the waxy, white formation still clinging to its sides — the man made wooden frame gives bees a place to store their honey. Malach notes that honeycomb is the same shape as the centre of the Star of David.

"It's the most intelligent shape," she says, of the bees' creation and of Judaism's six-point symbol. "No space lost."

About eight years ago when Malach started seeing hexagons everywhere, she knew bees were her calling. The Thornhill, Ontario native got a master's degree from York University in Environmental Studies with a focus on urban pollination. One day she hoped for hives of her own.

But, that takes space — about 30-metres on all sides. Her Queen St. W. backyard just couldn't cut it.

She took a job at [Shoresh](#) in 2010 as director of community outreach. A year later, a local philanthropist approached the Jewish environmental organization about creating a rural space where the urban Jew could experience life outdoors; grow plants, touch and feel where their food comes from, celebrate festivals and holidays outside "on the land" where they traditionally — and historically — took place.

What better way to connect with earth's sweetness than to raise bees? Malach immediately asked if she could create an apiary.

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With help from mentors, Malach started small, adding beekeeping to her work portfolio and driving out to Bela Farm every 10 days to check on the bees.

By late summer 2013 she was thrilled to extract about 80 pounds of honey from her two hives. It wasn't enough to sell, but it was enough to create a buzz.

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Fortunately, Shores had money to rebuild and grow.

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