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Nectar sector  
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Bees swarm to city landscapes and build homes, sweet homes

Leah Eskin

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The urban bee contends that the city is a fine place to raise a family. Indeed, superior to the arid conditions and floracultural poverty found in many a rural setting. The bee, like many of us, thrives here.

The local fauna does tend to construct shade-casting office towers and car-clotted streets. But it is also given to planting things. Things that bloom. In park, median or windowbox. And because humans are keen on watering their dZcor, the hardworking honey bee enjoys snack-shop convenience all over town.

There are broad expanses, particularly on the less populous West Side, where a kind of bucolic charm interlaces the open stretches of underdevelopment.

In Lawndale, a bee can find a comfortable home and prosperous living. In fact, on West Fillmore, within sight of the original Sears Tower in all its brick handiwork charm, and the subsequent Sears Tower in all its skyscraping glory, lies a concrete-paved lot a developer imagines as townhomes-to-be and a collective of urban farmers runs as a honey farm.

Behind a chain-link fence marked Sweet Beginnings stand 35 beehives. Not the old-fashioned curvilinear sort, but modern condominium-style hives: bright white, squared off, five stories high and neatly aligned, like a surrealist vision of dresser drawers on a field trip. In high season, each houses 50,000 bees.

Within an easy commute the enterprising forager can find aster, goldenrod and, happily, sweet clover in abundance.

The beehive development has amenities, like a garden dug into half the lot, and two huge watering tubs with wine-cork floats to accommodate the thirsty worker or drone. They "raise brood" in frames, conveniently prestamped with the hexagonal pattern favored by bees of all social classes.

The queens are pleased. So much so that each has commanded her hive to produce surplus honey. Which human workers, moving with tai chi fluidity and concentration, harvest spring and fall. Many are learning beekeeping under an employment program for the formerly incarcerated. The city is all about opportunity.

The worker people spin out the honey, bottle it and sell it under the label Beeline at Green City and other open-air markets. The bees don't seem to mind. The honey tax is simply the price of city living.

HONEY ICE CREAM

Serves eight

2 cups whole milk

1 cup whipping cream

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

5 egg yolks

6 tablespoons honey

1. Scald: Bring milk, cream and cinnamon just to the boiling point in a medium saucepan.
2. Whisk: Vigorously whisk yolks and honey in a medium bowl. Continue to whisk, slowly adding hot milk mixture.
3. Thicken: Return mixture to the saucepan and whisk over medium-low until thick. Do not boil. If you discover a curdling mess in your pan, do not despair. The blender can smooth things over. Just remember that steam tends to blow the top off the blender and custard all over the kitchen. Mind that "hot fill" line on the carafe.
4. Freeze: Strain into a bowl and cool. Churn, following the habits of your ice cream maker. Enjoy solo or over apple tart (recipe follows).

## APPLE TART

Serves eight

1/4 cup butter

1/2 cup sugar

3/4 cup almond meal\*

1 egg

1/8 teaspoon almond extract

1 package frozen all-butter puff pastry, thawed

2 apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

3 tablespoons honey

1. Fluff: Beat butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in (in order): almond meal, egg and extract.
2. Cut: Unfold puff pastry onto a lightly floured surface. Cut into 8 sections (squares are efficient, but circles suggest apple). Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet.
3. Fill: Spread a generous tablespoon of almond cream onto each tart, leaving a 1/2-inch border bare. (For individual tarts, you have may leftover cream.) Arrange apples over the cream in a pleasing pattern. Melt together butter, honey; drizzle over apples. Chill at least 15 minutes.
4. Puff: Bake at 375 until golden and thoroughly puffed, about 20 minutes. Serve warm with or without a scoop of honey ice cream.

\*If you can't find almond meal, pulse 2/3 cup slivered almonds with the sugar in the food processor. Thanks to Atkins and Bob's Red Mill flours, which inspired this recipe, it's now available in many grocery stores.

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