

MEAD MAKING WORKSHOP

Introduction:

There are many different types of mead. Mead enthusiasts can vigorously discuss the pros and cons of different honeys, yeasts, spices and water etc. However we will be following a simple recipe using basic ingredients and brewing technique that will yield good results for a minimum of expense and effort.

INGREDIENTS:

HONEY	Honey provides the sugar for the fermentation process to convert to alcohol. Honey can be up to about 70% sugar and it also provides the distinctive flavour of mead. Approx 2kg is needed to make one gallon, 4.5l of sweet mead.
WATER	Tap Water to bring the brewing volume up to one gallon, 4.5l.
SPICES / FRUIT	~6 Cloves and 1 Cinnamon stick to add flavour and excitement.
LEMON JUICE	1 lemon. Ensure good fermentation + Impart flavour.
COLD TEA	1/2 Cup. Ensure good fermentation + Impart flavour.
YEAST NUTRIENT	1 tsp. Ensure good fermentation.
YEAST	1 sachet. The active microscopic fungus that converts the sugar to alcohol.

APPARATUS:

DEMIJOHN	This is traditionally a 1 gallon (4.5l) glass vessel.
AIRLOCK	To release carbon dioxide and prevent the ingress of bacteria.
FUNNEL	Aid adding ingredients to the demijohn and for bottling.
THERMOMETER	To measure brewing temperature.
BOTTLE BRUSH	To aid cleaning inside a demijohn.
STERILISER	To kill germs and bacteria.
THERMOMETER	A Strip thermometer.

BREWING STEPS:

STERILISATION Everything must be clean and sterile. First wash all equipment then treat with brewing sterilising solution for correct duration and finally rinse with fresh tap water so your brew is not killed off. Current potable water and food standards mean you do not need to sterilise the tap water or the honey.

ADD HONEY Using a funnel the honey can be poured into the sterilised demijohn. The honey can be softened by placing it in a microwave oven for a few seconds or leaving the sealed jars in hot water to warm up. Hot water can be used to rinse the last of the honey out of the jars but be careful when it comes to adding the yeast.

ADD SPICES / FRUIT Add the cloves and cinnamon stick. Cloves are very potent so put approx 6 in as more can be added later. You can also add crushed strawberries and similar. However this can foam up and block the airlock which can be messy so requires more care and observation when brewing.

ADD FERMENTATION AIDS Add the lemon juice (citric acid) and Stewed Tea (tannin). These both aid brewing and although are not strictly vital ensure greater chance of

success. They both also impart flavour which subtly enhance the finished result.

ADD WATER The demijohn needs to be filled up to just below the neck. Add water using the funnel. Warm (not hot) water will help mix the honey. You may want to add the yeast during this stage to aid mixing.

ADD YEAST Check the contents of the demijohn are below 30°C so as not to kill the yeast. Add a sachet (one teaspoon) of brewers yeast and one teaspoon of yeast nutrient. The nutrient is not strictly needed but will ensure the yeast has all the correct minerals, amino acids, etc to ensure it can thrive and therefore brew with best efficiency.

ADD AIRLOCK Firmly fit the sterilised rubber bung and sterilised air lock. Fill the airlock with cold tap water to the level mark.

AND WAIT Place the demijohn in a warm place with an optimum temperature between 20°C-27°C. Brewing will be faster at a warmer temperature, however not too hot as it will kill the yeast. Below 20°C fermentation will be infuriatingly slow and will take many months, however if the temperature can be kept consistently optimal fermentation will be complete in as little as a month or less. Next to a radiator or a warm part of your house should be sufficient but dedicated heaters can be used. Both external heating mats and blankets are available from brewing suppliers should you want an exact temperature.

FERMENTATION COMPLETION ? Fermentation must be complete before bottling! This can be detected by observing the airlock bubbling. During the most active stage of fermentation the air lock will be bubbling several times a second and will get slower over time. As a general guide fermentation can be considered complete when the air lock is bubbling less than one bubble per minute for at least a week. We are making a sweet mead so fermentation will stop when the alcohol tolerance level of the yeast is exceeded rather than the sugar / honey source is exhausted. Because of this using a hydrometer is not suitable to detect end of fermentation. Fermentation can be artificially halted for bottling by adding stabilising compound.

SETTLING The spent yeast settling to the bottom of the demijohn is probably the most lengthy process. With enough time and careful handling the mead can become a crystal clear golden liquid. This can take time and very careful decanting as the sediment is light and easily disturbed. However this is not essential and satisfactory, if not a little murky, results can be obtained in a short time. Settling is quicker when cold.

BOTTLING Pouring the mead into bottles is desirable. Any food grade bottle will do. The mead made with this method is a flat (not sparkling) drink so pressure bottles are not needed. Care must be made when pouring the mead from the demijohn because the sediment will be disturbed. The best method is to empty the demijohn in one movement into a second container or using syphon tube. You may prefer to decant into a second demijohn and then into bottles so as not to disturb the sediment.

WARNING: If fermentation is not complete at the time of bottling then there is the possibility that a sealed non pressure rated bottle may rupture or explode. If bottling or consuming before fermentation is complete then add a stabiliser or do not seal the bottle.