



Making mead

Written by a DeFalco Staff Member



Mead is a fermented beverage with honey as its sole source of fermentable sugar. It has considerable roots in history and is known as the first alcoholic beverage, dating as far back as 14000 years. One can imagine a pot of honey accidentally left out in the rain by our ancestors. The dilution must have been just right, the sun's warmth subtle enough for the wild yeast to thrive, and the forgotten pot discovered at the perfect time.

The person adventurous enough to sample the fermented drink would have been the first to experience the effects of alcohol intoxication. The magical properties of this potion are still as highly regarded as they were back then.

A traditional Mead is made with only honey, water, and yeast. Add fruit and it is known as Melomel. Use honey with apple juice and it becomes Cyser. Any

Mead flavoured with herbs and spices is called Metheglin. Mead can be dry, medium or sweet, and is either still or sparkling.

There are many choices to make before embarking on a Mead making journey. Chart #1 is a rough guideline adapted from Charlie Papazian's HOME BREWER'S COMPANION to help the Mead maker determine the amount of honey needed depending on the style and volume of the recipe.

Chart #1

TYPE OF MEAD	KG PER IMP. GAL. (OR 4.5L)	ORIGINAL GRAVITIES	FINAL GRAVITIES
Sparkling	1.1 Kg	1.070	0.996
Dry (still)	1.2 - 1.4 Kg	up to 1.110	1.000 - 1.010
Medium (still)	1.4 - 1.6 Kg	1.100 - 1.120	1.010 - 1.015
Sweet (still)	1.2 - 2 Kg	1.120 - 1.135	1.020 - 1.050

* Note: The addition of fruit could alter the predictability of this chart.
 * Note: Sparkling Mead is usually dry and made from a low gravity recipe. The low gravity is needed to provide the proper environment for the secondary bottle fermentation.

What Type of Honey?

Honey is referred to by the floral source it comes from. The availability of honey is determined by geography and season.

Noble honeys are:

- Clover
- Starthistle
- Wild flower
- Blackberry
- Orange blossom
- Alfalfa
- Mesquite

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Each of these honeys are light in colour and excellent for Mead making. Clover is the most common honey available in this region, and fortunately, is regarded as one of the finest for Mead making.

Stay clear of refined honey. The pasteurization process drives away aroma and flavour and also removes valuable fermentable enzymes.

Yeast

Select a good strong yeast for Mead. Lalvin EC-1118 is the strain which has the necessary tools to complete the task.

Nutrient

Honey lacks the nutrients suitable for a healthy fermentation. This is why many recipes require the addition of yeast nutrient. Nutrient is added at 1/2 tsp. per Imp. Gal. This should produce a reasonably predictable fermentation. Be careful of adding too much nutrient as it will contribute to off flavours.

There is an alternate view that maintains a purist approach to Mead making. The purist will add no additive or enhancer to a recipe. This will produce a much longer and unpredictable fermentation.

Temperatures

Unlike wine or beer which can be adversely effected by high fermentation temperatures, Mead benefits with a fermentation that reaches a warm 27°C or 80°F.

Now that you know some of the basics and have the urge to experiment with Mead, there are some aspects to consider before starting:

- a) Mead is a long-term project. Prepare to have a few carboys tied up for 3 - 6 months.

- b) Fermentation can be tricky. Even with the addition of yeast nutrient the fermentations can be problematic. Multiple yeast pitchings may be required. Be Patient.
- c) Some Meads take at least one year to age before they are drinkable. Especially Fruit Mead.

Here is a simple Fruit Mead (Melomel) that I have tried.

St. Bruno's Red Current Melomel

Recipe for 23L or 5 Imp. Gals.

INGREDIENTS:

- 6 - 7 Kg of Clover honey
- 2.5 - 3 Kg of Red Currents (or fruit of your choice)
- 2 1/2 tsp. yeast nutrient
- 2 pkg. Lalvin EC-1118

PROCESS:

- Add honey, nutrient, and 2-3L of water to the brew pot.
- De-stem and crush berries, add to brew pot.
- Bring the mixture to 77°C (to 170°F) and hold for 30 minutes to pasteurize. Skim off any white scum from the surface as it forms.
- Pour into primary fermentor and add water to bring the mixture to 23L (5 gals).
- Add yeast when the temperature cools to 27°C or 80°F.
- Allow the fermentation temperature to stay within the 20°C to 27°C range.
- Do not leave the mead on the fruit for more than two weeks. I would suggest transferring around the 7 - 10 day point only if the fermentation looks calm enough.
- Continue the fermentation until clearing is evident (it could take 2-3 months) then transfer one more time.
- Bottle when Mead is crystal clear.



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