

Basic Mead Brewing in the SCA

"How to Get Started"

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Mead! The very word conjures up images of a huge feast hall with lords and ladies laughing, eating, and drinking flagons of this delicious beverage. "Mead" can come in many forms and many of you may be wondering just exactly how to make some of this wonderful stuff so that you can take it to events. Before we get into that, let's clear the air with some proper definitions. There are many things that people call "mead". They are usually not really mead, but some variation.

MEAD - Honey wine made without any spices or fruits

METHEGLIN - Honey wine made with spices

MELOMEL - Honey wine made with fruit
PYMENT Honey wine with grapes
CYSER Honey wine with apple juice

HIPPOCRAS Honey wine with fruit AND spices

SACK MEAD Very sweet honey wine
SACK METHEGLIN - Very sweet spiced honey wine

I have tried to lay down some basic guidelines for brewing your own, starting with items typically needed in your brewing workshop (i.e. kitchen) as well as some of the best recipes I gathered over the years

Basic Materials for a Brewing Workshop

HONEY - Depending on whether you intend a quick (fizzy) mead or a still (wine-like) mead you will need between a *pint* and two quarts. The weight depends on when it was harvested, how old it is, and what kind it is. The best general rule of thumb is that honey weighs 12 lbs. per gallon, so 2 qts. = 6 lbs. 2 pints = 3 lbs. and 1 cup = .75 lbs. The flavour and quality of your honey will be reflected in your mead. In fact it will make ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD. This means Sue Bee honey and other processed honey will be very different from fresh local honey.

CLEAN WATER - Some people insist on bottled water, which is fine, but I personally feel it is a rather useless expense unless there is something wrong with the local water. I sometimes use a filter to remove chemicals such as chlorine. I do recommend always starting with cold water and let it *run* for 10-15 seconds from the tap before you starting using it. This will ensure you have the freshest water available. Hot water has been sitting in your waiter heater picking up minerals and chemicals.

STAINLESS, STEEL, GLASS, OR UNCRACKED ENAMEL COOKWARE -

Your brewpot should be at least five quart capacity. You will want to make at least one gallon batches and you need room to boil. I typically make 5 gallon batches in a 20 quart stockpot.

GALLON JUGS CLEAN - These are your primary fermenters. One gallon apple cider jugs are great. You can use plastic, but you must make sure it is food-grade plastic.

CLEAR PLASTIC TUBING - At least two yards, about 1/2-inch (13mm) diameter. Available in hardware stores. This is to siphon the clear liquid off of the dead yeast which has settled to the bottom (a process called 'racking'). If you can, plug one end and drill two holes through the side about 1 inch from the plug. This will allow you to put it on the bottom without sucking up the dead yeast from the bottom.

MESH SKIMMER - This is a fine-mesh strainer used to skim foam off the top as the liquid boils. Available at most cookware stores, and it must be able to be put into your boiling pot. Some people use a spoon to scoop out the foam, but I prefer a strainer.

FERMENTATION LOCK - This funny shaped contraption is usually filled with water or vodka and prevents your brew from becoming contaminated by allowing the pressure to escape without allowing room air to get in. You also need a rubber cork to fit the top of your bottle. Available through brewing supply stores. A couple of good sources are-

Homebrew Adventures
1109-A Central Ave.
Charlotte NC 23204
1-888-785-7766
<http://www.homebrew.com/>

The Home Brewery
P.O.Box 730
Ozark, MO 65721
1-800-321-BREW (2739)
<http://www.homebrewery.com>

If you just can't get a lock and a cork, you can use a balloon over the top of your bottle. As your mead ferments, the balloon will blow up (fill with carbon dioxide). Every now and then, before the balloon bursts, you need to crack the mouth a little and deflate the balloon. **NOTE:** You must turn the balloon inside out to prevent talc (powder that is inside the balloon to keep it from sticking together) from falling inside your mead as the pressure blows up the balloon.

YEAST - Yeast specifically for mead is best, but Champagne or Ale yeast work very well. **DO NOT USE BAKER'S YEAST.** Baker's yeast is designed to create lots of carbon dioxide (to make bread rise) and little alcohol. Your brew will taste very yeasty and not very good. Brewing yeast is designed to ferment slower, taste better, and is available in brewing supply stores or from other brewers.

SPOONS - You need a big spoon for stirring. One that is long enough. to reach the bottom of your pot.

THERMOMETER - A candy thermometer works just fine. A thermometer is not absolutely critical, but I find it helps to determine when my mead is cool enough to add the yeast. When I don't have one, I let it sit overnight (with a fermentation lock on to protect it) before adding the yeast.

And now... ON TO THE RECIPES

Master Terafan's Clove Mead

3 lbs. honey (1 quart) 1 lemon 1 cup strong tea
12 cloves Yeast

Add the honey to one gallon of boiling water. Turn off the heat and stir well. Slice or juice the lemons and add along with the clove and tea. Let stand covered until cool. Pour into a gallon jug and add the yeast. Epernay II yeast works very well, but champagne yeast or ale yeast are also fine.

Let it ferment for 18 days, and then siphon into bottles. Seal or cap the bottles and let sit at room temperature for two weeks, then put in the refrigerator. You can drink it at any time now.

Master Robyyan's Quick Mead or Weak Honey Drink

Drinks of fermented honey and water are *some of* the earliest known to man. This weak honey drink is based on a recipe from Sir Kenelme Digbie's Closet, although Robyyan has modified it.

Original recipe (Digbie, p. 124):

Take nine pints of warm fountain water, and dissolve in it one point of pure white honey, by laving it therein, till it be dissolved. Then boil it gently, skimming it all the while, till all the scum be perfectly scummed off; and after that boil it a little longer, peradventure a quarter of an hour. In all it will require two or three hours boiling, so at least one third part may be consumed. About a quarter of an hour before you cease boiling, and take it from the fire, put to it a little spoonful of cleansed and sliced Ginger; and almost half as much of the thin yellow rind of Orange, when you are even ready to take it from the fire, so as the Orange boil only one walm in it. Then pour it into a well glassed strong deep great Gally-pot, and let it stand so, till it be almost cold, that it be scarce Luke-warm. Then put into it a little silver spoonful of pure Ale-yeast and work it together with a Ladle to make it ferment: as soon as it beginneth to do so, cover it close with a fit cover, and put a thick dubbled woollen cloth about it. Cast all things so that this may be done when you are going to bed.

Next morning when you rise, you will find the barm gathered all together in the middle; scum it clen off with a silver spoon and a feather, and bottle up the Liquor, stopping it very close. It will be ready to drink in two or three days, but is will keep well a month or two. It will from the first, very quick and pleasant.

Master Robyyan's recipe:

Add one pound of honey to 5 quarts of water, bring the mixture to a simmer and skim the foam as it rises, until there is no more foam, approximately 30 minutes. Add approx. 2 tbsp. coarsely chopped fresh ginger, the juice of *one lemon*, and 8 cloves, stuck into the lemon peel for easy removal. Boil for 15 minutes, then remove from the heat and cool to lukewarm. Place the wort in a jug, straining the ginger and lemon pieces out. Add 1/4 tsp. ale yeast, and fit a fermentation lock.

After 48 hours, bottle and store at room temperature. After 48 hours in the bottle, refrigerate.

Gyrth's Quick or "Short" Mead

2 quarts honey	5 gal. water
2 cups strong tea	1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon nutmeg	2 teaspoons cinnamon
3-5 lemons	Mead yeast
A plastic sieve	A wooden spoon
A big pot	A 5 gallon jug or carboy
A thermometer	All yours and everybody else's used coke or beer bottles

What follows is a step by step explanation from Duke Sir Gyrth Oldcastle of Ravenspur on exactly how he makes mead:

First, boil water. I make two batches at a time with a three gallon pot. Add honey on a one part honey to nine parts water basis. (Honey weighs 12 lb. to the gallon.) I use a quart per 2 1/2 gallon batch. Stir it about to dissolve the honey in the water. The honey will sink to the bottom of the pot and burn unless stirred at first. When the mixture is bubbling happily, a whitish scum will rise to the surface. Spoon it away.

Scum removal is a topic of controversy among brewers. Some maintain that complete removal is the only way to go,- others like myself skim until there's only a very little left. Suit yourself.

Remove from heat and add one cup of very strong tea (2 cups per 5 gallons) (From herein on I assume that the measurements are for 5 gallons of mead)), 1 teaspoon of ginger, 1 teaspoon of nutmeg, and 2 teaspoons of cinnamon. Then take 3-5 lemons, Slice them thin, and throw them in. Let the lemons steep in the must (must is what you call incipient mead) for 30 minutes; then remove the slices. The tea and lemon move the pH of the must towards one comfortable for the yeast.

Let the whole caboodle cool to about 80-85 degrees F. Then introduce your yeast to it, cap it with an airlock, and stand back. After 5 days taste it. If too sweet, let it continue; if too alcoholic (unlikely) add more boiled honey and water. Keep tasting daily until sweetness and alcohol balance each other out. Syphon it off into bottles and refrigerate. If not refrigerated, it will get progressively less sweet and slide irrevocably into undrinkability. Let stand 2-5 weeks. Drink and enjoy. it ties up refrigerator space, but tends to be worth it.

NOTE - When refrigerated the mead tends to settle, and at this point I find it advantageous to siphon again into clean bottles, seal tightly, and re-refrigerate. It makes for a sweeter, more sparkling mead.

SMoY Mead

This recipe is one I got from Sir Michael of York (SMoY, hence the name) and has become one of my favourites. Syr Michael, raised in the East Kingdom, wrote the original article on brewing in the *Knowne World Handbook*. He has won East Kingdom brewing competitions several times with this recipe.

3 lbs. honey (1 quart)	2 lemons
Yeast	3 nutmegs, chopped (or 1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg)

Add the honey to one gallon of water and bring it to a boil. Skim off the foam that boils up, and keep boiling until it stops *foaming*, approximately 30 minutes. Slice or juice the lemons and add along with the nutmeg. Mix well, turn off the heat and let stand covered until cool. Pour into a gallon jug and add the yeast. Champagne yeast or ale yeast works best.

Let it ferment for two weeks, and then siphon into bottles. (Siphoning off the good liquid and leaving the dregs is called 'racking') Seal or cap the bottles and let sit at room temperature for two weeks, then put in the refrigerator. **If you let it sit out longer, the bottles may start to explode.** You can drink it at any point now, and should have a frothy, pleasant drink.

Basic Wildflower Sack Mead

2 quarts honey (preferably wildflower)	1 gallon water
1 cup white raisins	1 egg

To one gallon of water add two quarts of honey and the white of one, egg, mixing WELL. Cook the mixture at medium heat on the stove, stirring continuously. When the mix comes to a boil all the scum rises to the top to be skimmed, assisted by the egg white, just like you clear stock. When no more scum rises add the raisin, turn off the heat, and cover overnight. In the morning crush and strain out the raisins, add the yeast, and transfer the liquid (called 'must') to a glass jug with a fermentation lock. Keep any excess to top off the mead after racking.

The first racking should be done after one month and the next when fermentation stops. Rack again about three, months later. It is important to keep the mead topped off to keep the airspace in the bottle to a minimum. When you can read newsprint through the jug of mead, bottle and cork. Don't touch for at least a year.

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