

# Beginner's Mead Making

By Rick Dawman (the SCAdian known as Baron Edward Shirebrooke, THL)

## The four basic ingredients

- 1) Water
- 2) Sugar
- 3) Yeast
- 4) Time

## What you will need

- 1) Stew Pot (stainless steel & as large as possible)
- 2) Brew Bucket w/ airlock
- 3) 2 liter soda bottles
- 4) Transfer tube

## A brief explanation

Brewing is simple for one reason, you don't do any hard work! All you have to do is put the stuff together and add yeast. Then the yeast eat the sugars and produces alcohol and carbon dioxide as a byproduct, they eat until there is no more sugars left or until the environment is no longer viable for them to live in. Now, there are many things you *could* do in brewing to say, get certain flavors or make certain things 'just right'. But honestly, it doesn't have to be that difficult!

## How the process works

First of all you need to get your supplies and your brewing equipment. The supplies you need will depend on what you want to make, but for the sake of this example, we are going to make a Simple Mead. First you will want to put your honey into the stew pot, I like to use about 15lbs for a five gallon batch of mead. Then add water, straight tap water is usually fine, but never use distilled water. Fill the stew pot up to about half an inch or so from the top and then set the pot on the stove. **DO NOT TURN ON THE HEAT YET!** You have 15lbs of honey in the bottom of that thing, if you turn on the heat, you will scorch the honey. Instead, find a plastic spoon and stir until you no longer feel resistance at the bottom of the pot. Now you can add the heat, the honey has been dissolved into the water equally and your brew is not in danger. Boiling your brew is so that any bacteria or wild yeast that may have been present in the honey or the water is killed, thus making it ready for the yeast you will add later. I suggest a low boil for anywhere between 30 to 60 minutes depending on how paranoid you are feeling today. Set a timer and walk away, come back every 10 minutes to give it a quick stir. **HELPFUL HINT:** If you want your brew to age well, throw in a couple tea bags while it boils.

While your brew is boiling, grab your brew bucket and airlock, place them in the bathtub. Pour about two or three capful of bleach into the bucket and add hot water, throw in the airlock. In 30 minutes retrieve the airlock and dump out the bucket, rinse everything. You now have a sanitized container in which to place your brew while the yeast go to work.

When the timer goes off and your brew is finished boiling, dump your brew from the stew pot into the bucket, slap the lid on it and attach the airlock. Go to bed, dream of excellent mead.

The next morning your brew will be cool enough to introduce the yeast. Rip open a packet, crack a corner of the lid and pour it in. Reseal the bucket and double check to make sure the airlock

still has water in it. In a couple days the airlock should have some bubbles pushing through it.

One month later, put your brew bucket on the kitchen table. Go and sanitize your transfer tube and 2-liter soda bottles with bleach, remember that it takes 30 minutes, and don't forget to rinse! Fill your transfer tube with tap water and place a pot on the floor beneath the brew bucket. While holding one end of the tube with your thumb tightly over the end, place the other end into the brew bucket. Place the other end into the pot and release the end of the tube, this will start your siphon. Once the water turns into your brew, pinch the hose to stop the flow, grab a 2-liter bottle, stick the hose in it and let it go until it fills up. I recommend leaving about an inch or so at the top of the bottle, this will help later on. Once you have everything transferred, put the bottles in a dark place. The next day, go and untwist each of the bottles for a second. Did any of them hiss? Then they are still brewing, but very slowly. Remember to do this every day until you no longer hear a hiss, then do it once a week until you no longer hear a hiss. After the mead has been in the bottle for about a month it should be decent to drink, but for best results wait four months or more. But don't wait too long, those 2-liter bottles won't hold forever and after about a year, maybe sooner, the brew will start to go bad.

### **The Unbreakable Rules**

- 1) **CLEAN, CLEAN, CLEAN!!**  
Using bleach or other sanitizer on everything will keep your brews from going bad!
- 2) **ANYTHING ADDED TO YOUR BREW MUST BE CLEANED FIRST!**  
If you add something for any reason, have it boiled or somehow cleaned first.
- 3) **NEVER USE DISTILLED WATER!**  
Distillation removes minerals necessary for yeast survival, well water is usually best!
- 4) **ADD YOUR FLAVORING AFTER FERMENTATION IS COMPLETE!**  
Use Potassium Sorbate to kill the yeast when sweetening or adding flavor, otherwise the yeast will go back to brewing and it will ruin the taste you are attempting to create.

### **Suppliers and Additional Resources**

<http://www.ashevillebrewers.com>

Based out of Asheville, this company has provided me with helpful and very satisfactory service. The one drawback is that they don't seem to be very internet savvy; however they now have online ordering available.

<http://www.alternativebeverage.com>

These guys are based out of the Charlotte area, good selection of items you may need but I hesitate to give them good scores for helping new brewers. My suggestion is to learn somewhere else, they don't seem to have time to talk to anyone who doesn't know much.

<http://www.gotmead.com>

It's everything you could ever want to know about mead and brewing with honey. If you specifically want to brew only with honey, this is the place to check out.

<http://www.williamsbrewing.com>

This company is way out on the west coast somewhere so if you order from them you will pay a lot in shipping. But they have things that others simply don't have.

<http://www.northernbrewer.com>

I've recently ordered from this company with excellent results. When contacted about a problem with my shipment they were simply awesome and bent over backward to fix it.

*Making Mead* by Brian Acton and Peter Duncan published by Argus Books Ltd.  
ISBN 0-9619072-8-2

*The New Complete Joy of Homebrewing* by Charlie Papazian published by Avon Books  
ISBN 0-380-76366-4

*The Lore of Still Building* by Kathleen Howard and Norman Gibat  
ISBN 1-88411-107-6