

Put Down The Mash Paddle; Put Away The Boil Pot

- Today: Introduction to cider and mead, plus braggot, perry, metheglin, and other weirdomels
- Next month, fermentation specifics

What are they?

- Delicious
- BJCP Categories 24-28
- Surprisingly easy to make

No, really, what are they?

- Just another fermented sugar
- Fermented grain = beer
- Fermented grapes = wine
- Fermented apples = cider
- Fermented pears = perry
- Fermented honey and water = mead (the unfermented honey/water mixture is known as “must”, the same word is used to describe unfermented fruit juice in winemaking. However the term “honey wine” is not technically accurate due to the addition of water.)

Other fun facts:

- There is no need to boil honey/fruit juice. However excellent sanitation is key.
- Mead is generally fermented with white wine yeast due to alcohol tolerance.
- “Mead takes a long time” is not necessarily true. However if properly done it can last for many years.
- Mead = honey = sweet? – Not necessarily! Honey is nearly 100% fermentable (with 410 – 450 gravity points!) and if the yeast are up for it they may bring your FG well below 1.000.
- For competitions Mead is classified by strength: Hydromel if less than 7.5% ABV, Standard between 7.5 and 14% ABV, and Sack > 14% ABV.
- Mead is also classified by carbonation, which can be Still, Sparkling, or Petillant (i.e. “in between”)
- Mead is also classified by residual sweetness. Final Gravity below 1.010 is generally considered Dry, 1.010 – 1.025 as Semi-Sweet, and >1.025 as Sweet...
- ...however remember “Perception Is Reality” If FG is 1.012 but it tastes very sweet, enter as Sweet.
- Cider and Perry are also classified by residual sweetness and carbonation.
- Cider can be fermented with white wine yeasts, American/Belgian/German ale yeasts, lager yeasts, or wild yeasts common on fruit skin.
- Pears are generally less fermentable than apples, mostly due to the presence of the unfermentable sugar sorbitol. Perry therefore may have a bit more body/sweetness/higher FG than similar cider.
- Honey is very low on nutrients compared to wort, so most add significant amounts of yeast nutrients to keep yeast happy and eating. More on Staggered Nutrient Additions and Degassing next month.
- Don’t throw out crystallized honey. Warm it up and it should melt.
- Fruit has quite a bit more nutrients than honey but adding some yeast nutrients is still a good practice.
- Honey is fricking expensive! However there is a surprisingly wide range of flavors/aromas in the various varieties. Consider raspberry blossom, orange blossom, tupelo, or sage honeys.
- We’ll talk about tannin, astringency, acid, MLF, balance, yeast choices, etc next month.

Some sub-styles...

BJCP Cat 27: Common Cider and Perry

- 27A: Common Cider – catch-all for cider made with table apples. Wide range of sweetness, carbonation, flavor.
- 27B: English Cider – made with bittersweet/bittersharp tannin-rich English apples that are basically inedible, dry (both in low FG and in finish), astringent (from the tannins) lower carbonation, and often with a smoky or barnyard component.
- 27C: French Cider – French apples, much sweeter than English Cider, typically much higher carbonation and full Mouthfeel. They may stop fermentation early to save residual sweetness or back-sweeten.
- 27D: Common Perry – made with table pears. Note that pear is not a strong flavored fruit, and this beverage often is more white wine-like than many ciders.
- 27E: Traditional Perry – made with special perry pears which are nearly inedible.

BJCP Cat 28: Specialty Cider and Perry (we'll taste some of these next month)

- 28A: New England Cider – acidic New England apples, with white/brown sugar or molasses/raisin adjuncts to raise gravity. Sometimes a bit of oak.
- 28B: Fruit Cider – apples or pears with other fruit, or a mixture of apples and pears. The other fruit must not dominate.
- 28C: Applewine – somewhat to very dry cider with a light body from the addition of sugar to raise alcohol to 9-12%. Can be very much like white wine.
- 28D: Other Specialty Cider and Perry – use of spices, adjuncts, wild yeast, or other things that don't fit in the other categories.

BJCP Category 24: Straight Mead (just honey, water, yeast and usually nutrients - nothing else)

- This category is divided by residual sweetness – 24A Dry, 24B Semi-Sweet, and 24C Sweet. Different character comes from the specific varietal of honey, with some yeast component as well.

BJCP Category 25: Melomel (generic term for any mead with fruit)

- Fruit character can be quite intense, but this should not be just a fruit wine. Dry examples have less fruit than sweet. A couple melomels are so popular they get their own category. 25A: Cyser – mead with apples, and 25B: Pyment – mead with grapes. Everything else goes in 25C: Other Fruit Melomel

BJCP Category 26: Other Mead

- 26A: Metheglin – mead made with spices. A few specific varieties have their own name – mead with roses is known as Rhodomel, mead with chili peppers is called Capsumel, etc.
- 26B: Braggot – where beer meets honey, with noticeable characteristics of both.
- 26C: Open Category Mead – Anything that doesn't fit in the other categories, or is a combination of other categories.