

Mead

Mead has a long and rich history full of myth and legend. I'll spare you the anecdotes, but it's not hard to recognize that mead may have been the first fermented product discovered because of its simplicity. Water, honey, and whatever airborne yeast that may have fallen into an urn can make mead. Today's recipes are not much different from ones of 3000 years ago. Of course we use modern techniques and ingredients to "tweak" the mead, but it is more or less the same product.

The character of mead is not unlike a white wine. It can be sweet or dry, tart or bland, high or low alcohol. By itself, mead is delicious, but it also lends itself to mixing with other flavors. There are many variations on mead using spices, herbs, fruit, and malt. Below I've written the standard mead recipe. If you would like to explore additional flavors in a mead I've included a couple of popular suggestions.

Still Mead

15	lbs	Honey
1	Tbsp	Gypsum (for a lower pH)
4	tsp	Acid Blend (adds tartness)
3	tsp	Yeast Nutrient (feeds yeast)
1	pk	Irish Moss Table - Whirlfloc (helps clarity)
2	pk	Champagne Yeast

Some optional ingredients

1-6	ozs	Fresh ginger
3	ozs	cinnamon, mint, hops, or clove
1-6	lbs	Fruit (berries, grapes, cherries)
4	ozs	Fruit concentrate
2	gals	Apple juice (in place of water)
1	can	Wine concentrate

Herbs and spices can be added to the boil or added at bottling time in a strong tea. Whole fruit should be added in the primary and strained out after 1 week. To boil or not to boil, is that a question?

There is a debate in mead making over the need to boil your ingredients. A quick answer is no, you don't have to. Boiling will evaporate some aromatic properties of the honey and kill enzymes. But, boiling will also separate impurities in the honey, blend ingredients, sanitize, improve clarity, and makes the kitchen smell really good. So, for my recipes, I say boil. Add 1 1/2 gals of water to honey, gypsum, acid blend, and Irish moss in a 4 gallon stock pot. Bring to boil for 15 mins. Foam will appear at the top of the boil. Skim the foam off. This is protein separating from the honey. Skimming this will add clarity. Add the boiled honey to the fermenter with cold water to make 5 gals. Add yeast and nutrient when the temp reaches 70°.

Honey is a slow fermenter. Foaming and blow off is rare, but leave a little head space in the fermenter just in case. After 2 weeks in primary, transfer to a secondary. Two month fermentations are not uncommon. Meads take patience. Transfer again when fermentation is done, and again 2 months later. After 6 months of aging, you can bottle. Best served after 1 year.

Equipment for a 5 gallon batch:

5 gal Kettle
Two 5 gal Carboys/Fermenters (glass or plastic)
Airlock
Stopper
Funnel
Hydrometer
Thermometer
Sampler/Thief
Syphon Hose
Racking Cane
Bottle Filler
Corker
Corks
Wine Bottles

Optional equipment

Straining Bag
Sulfite or other sanitizer
Spoon