

Improving Your Extract Beers

Wizards Club Meeting, August 18, 2009

A frequent discussion topic amongst the club is why do some beers taste great and some not so great? Invariably that turns into a discussion about techniques, ingredients, recipes and so on. Another point that has often come up is the distinction between extract and all-grain brewing and whether or not one can make a truly exceptional beer using malt extracts. Clearly the answer has to be yes as we've all sampled some great extract beers and often can't even tell they are extracts! So the question has to become what separates the good ones from the bad ones? Somewhere at the top of the list has to be having the right technique. With this very topic in mind, a round table discussion on brewing better extract beers was held at the August 2009 club meeting. Many excellent ideas and suggestions were presented by the fifteen to twenty club members who participated. The ideas collected during this discussion were grouped into similar ideas and then prioritized by voting. The remainder of this article captures the round table's results. Excellent beers can be made with extract and with a few pointers you could be making them!

The idea is simple. If you want to make a better beer, start at step 1, make sure it's part of your process and then keep moving down the list.

1. Clean and thoroughly sanitize everything that contacts your beer after boiling. (12)
2. Use the freshest malt extract possible. (10)
3. Step up to steeping grains for an increase in flavor. (8)
4. Use fresh hops instead of extracts already in the can. (6)
5. Boil as much of the full volume of beer to be brewed as you can. (4)
6. Add your extract to the pot incrementally, some at the beginning and the rest towards the end. (4)
7. Use fresh yeast and never use what comes under the lid of the can. Follow the manufacturer's directions; consider a starter for bigger beers. (4)
8. Chill quickly after boiling. (1)
9. Watch fermentation temperatures – they should align to the yeast you are using (1)
10. Use yeast suitable to the style of beer you are brewing.
11. If your water tastes good, it's ok to use for brewing, otherwise filter it.
12. Maintain rolling boil for an hour or more.
13. Aluminum pots and stirring constantly both help avoid malt sticking to the pot and burning.

These few tips should make a world of difference to your extract beer. It could be the next blue ribbon beer!