

South Tipperary Beekeepers' Association

Fact Sheet No. 26 How to make your first glass of Mead.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to inspire you to start making mead. This can be a very rewarding part of beekeeping from the perspective that you now have another product from your bees. It does not get into the chemistry or technical side, it's a simple to follow guide which will produce a good first mead.

Mead is in existence since 3000 BC. Honey was for thousands of years the principle sweetener known to mankind, honey and mead were the givers of life. Honey and mead are association with marriage and honeymoons. Mead was drunk during the wedding celebrations. It was believed that the bride was packed off to bed and the groom was then filled with mead until he could not stand. He was then carried to her bed where it was believed that he would sire a son. If no son was born 9 months later the mead maker was complimented on the quality of the mead.

Honey is produced from the nectar collected by the bees and processed into honey by both a chemical and physical reaction. Each type of flower produces its own unique flavoured and coloured honey. Most honey in Ireland comes from several different plants, shrubs and trees. It is this blend that gives it its unique flavour much prized by all connoisseurs. This type of honey is often referred to as multifloral honey. The summer crop is a good example of that. If all the nectar is sourced from a single plant then the honey is known as monofloral, for example heather. Good mead will only be the end result if good honey is used. The best place to source a quality honey is from your own bees or those of your nearest beekeeper. Avoid the temptation to buy the cheap supermarket honey which is always over strained and overheated thereby removing that delicate flavour you need to produce good mead. Cappings are not really suitable as it will probably have started to ferment by the time you get to clean it. A single blossom source of honey is a very good choice but not easy to source. OSR is not really a good choice. Heather honey is an excellent honey for mead production but takes a long time to mature.

The first step is to acquire all the equipment you need which is listed below. All can be sourced from home brew suppliers such as The Home Brew Company (<https://www.thehomebrewcompany.ie/>) or Home Brew West (<http://www.homebrewwest.ie/>).

Shopping list

1. Kettle
2. Plastic Bucket
3. 2 x Demijohns
4. Air Lock
5. 2 x Bung, one with and one without a hole
6. Nylon sieve
7. Plastic funnel
8. 1.2metres of symphony tube with tap
9. Corking tool

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Sterilisation

Sterilising every piece of equipment is a prerequisite to successfully producing mead. This can be achieved by submersing all equipment into a plastic bucket filled with a Milton solution (90mls Milton: 4.5litres of water). Fill the demijohns to the top with the solution. Submerge everything else for 15 minutes.

Camden Tablets can also be used, two campden tablets per pint of water. Put all equipment into plastic bucket with lid wait for 10 mins. These tablets sterilise by the by-product of the chemical reaction between the tablets and the water.

How to make up your Starter Bottle

Prepare 48 hours in advance

Use a lucozade bottle or similar size bottle, it has to be sterilised

Add the following ingredients

1. 140 ml H₂O boiled and cooled 28°C
2. Teaspoon Sugar
3. Teaspoon Lemon juice /Pinch citric acid
4. Yeast nutrient ¼ teaspoon
5. Yeast must be at (~26°C) for first 2 days
 - Mangrove Jack's M20 yeast for mead
 - Good quality champagne yeast

How to make the Must (Must being the raw material for the Mead)

Ingredients for Mead

1. Honey 1.8 Kgs (4 lbs.) for Sweet mead or 1.36 Kgs (3 lbs.) for Dry Mead
2. Boiled water 3½ litres
3. Magnesium Sulphate (Epsom salts)
4. Citric acid
5. Nutrient Young's yeast nutrient
6. Vitamin B1 tablets
7. Tannin or Very strong tea
8. Campden tablets

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Method

1. Sterilize Bucket.
2. Add the following items
 - a. Boiled H₂O 3½ litres
 - b. Magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts – 1 gr./ 4.54 litres)
 - c. 25g of acid (2/3 malic acid and 1/3 tartaric acid).
 - d. 1 level teaspoon of Nutrient Young's Yeast nutrient which contains Ammonium phosphate
 - e. ½ of a Vitamin B1 tablets /gallon
 - f. 1 tablespoon of very strong tea
 - g. the required amount of honey
3. Stir to dissolve.
4. Add 1 crushed Campden tablets / 4.54 litres.
5. Cover with cloth and secure.
6. After 48 hours, stir must vigorously to remove sulphur dioxide and add oxygen.
7. Pour in the starter bottle 27°C.
8. Cover and stir twice daily for 48 hours.
9. When fermentation takes hold transfer to demijohn up to shoulder (5 cm from top).
10. Fit airlock.
11. Fermenting temperature can now be reduced to 15°C.
12. Fermentation can take 6-8 weeks.
13. Rack twice during this period.
14. After fermentation finishes rack and add one crushed campden tablet.
15. Top up with boiled and cooled H₂O.
16. Replace air lock and continue to siphon off lees until clear.
17. When finished seal with solid bung and bottle after 6 months.
18. This mead is now ready for the honey show.
19. But patience is a virtue.

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There are several variations to mead by adding additional ingredients

Melomels by adding fruit

Metheglin by adding spices

Pyment by adding grape juice

Recipes for these can be found in the references given below.

Reference books

Ken Schramm: The Complete Meadmaker: home production of honey wine from your first batch to award-winning fruit and herb variations

Bryan Acton and Peter Duncan: Making Mead: A complete Guide to the making of Sweet and Dry Mead, Melomel, Metheglin, Hippocras, Pyment and Cyser

C. J. J. Berry: First Steps in Wine making