



Wellington Beekeepers Association

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Tips & Advice - Basic Mead Recipe

Mead Recipe

The following basic recipe will provide you with a working mead recipe that you can develop to become your most valuable resource and jumping off point. As you gain experience in mead-making, you will naturally make adjustments according to the taste and performance of the mead. Amounts listed here are approximate and intended as guidelines. Remember to keep notes for each batch you make.

The Basic Building Blocks

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The Basic Building Blocks

- Honey: 0.25 - 0.4 kg per litre of water. The amount of honey you use will vary according to the style and strength of mead you are making.
- Water: Good water (spring or bottled) to make up the total amount of the recipe
- Yeast: One packet of wine or ale yeast per 5 to 20 litres of mead.

Using these three basic ingredients will enable you to make show mead. Show mead, made from these three ingredients only is eligible for competition entry. Starting from a base of show mead, you can tinker with additives and adjuncts. Additives affect the working of the fermentation process, while adjuncts affect the taste, colour, or character of the final product. Technically, any time you add an adjunct, you have a mead variation rather than a straight mead.

Remember, honey is the primary ingredient in mead and should never be used as an afterthought or a mere flavouring. Variations should be built on a solid foundation of good mead-making. Use fruits or herbs only to enhance and complement the honey. Keep your priorities straight and consider honey first.

Additives

1. Yeast Nutrient or Energiser: equivalent of 1 teaspoon per 5 litres.

Honey, particularly when diluted, lacks sufficient nutrients to maintain healthy yeast activity. This problem is further exacerbated by boiling the must. Feed the yeast beasties so they can maintain sufficient energy for the long haul.

Alternative sources (per 5 litres): Raisins (handful); Bee pollen (1-5 tablespoons); Crushed bee larvae.

2. Acid: equivalent of 1 teaspoon per 5 litres

Alternative sources: Juice and (one) peel of any citrus fruit; Other fruit juice, pulp, skins

3. Tannin: equivalent of 1/4 teaspoons per 5 litres.

Alternative sources: Brewed black tea (1-2 tablespoons); Cream of tartar; Leaves, stems, and bark; grape skins

Note: exact amounts of alternative additives will vary with the recipe and personal preference. Use the "equivalent" amounts as a rough guide, remembering that those amounts represent concentrated amounts, and that amounts are per 5 litres.

Chemical vs Organic Additives

People tend to toss these two terms around rather imprecisely. Because both words have strong emotional connotations it is worthwhile to clarify the situation.

"Chemical" additives are acid blends, tannins, yeast energisers, and other powders that can be purchased through a wine supply store. These powdered crystals are synthetically derived.

"Natural" additives come from a primary source that contains the desired element. Strong black tea is a good source of tannin for instance, just as bee pollen yields protein, a yeast energiser. Raisins contain nitrogen, and fruit juice and peel are added for the acid they contain. Needless to say, the natural additives contain other substances as well. When adding citrus peel for acid, you will also get a small amount of aromatic oil.

Please note that although some people refer to "natural" mead as "organic", this is not necessarily an accurate description. Unless the materials added to the mead are cultivated without the use of chemicals, the mead cannot truly be called organic. So make it natural, make it chemical, but whichever method you chose, make it mead.

Now that you have a good idea of what elements go into the making of mead, let's look at a good working recipe.

Mead for All Seasons - A Basic Mead Recipe

This mead is appropriate for any season, ritual, or celebration. The recipe makes over 20 litres (about 27 standard bottles).

Ingredients:

- 7 kgs wildflower honey
- 4 teaspoons acid blend
- 6 teaspoons yeast nutrient
- 1 packet "Epernay 2" yeast
- 1.5 teaspoons grape tannin
- good water to make 22 litres

If the thought of chemicals makes you cringe, feel free to boil the must, substitute bee pollen for nutrients (1 tablespoon/litre), strong brewed black tea for tannin (1/5 tablespoon/litre), citrus peels (from 2-3 lemons or other fruit) for the acid blend.

Fermentation

1. In a good food-grade plastic bucket, mix honey with spring water sufficient to make 22 litres of liquid.
2. Add 1/4 teaspoon of sodium metabisulphite and let stand for 24 hours (cover loosely with cloth or plastic sheet).
3. Stir in the acid blend, tannin, and nutrients.
4. Add the yeast and stir vigorously to aerate
5. Skim daily with a sterilised strainer. After a few days fermentation will slow.
6. Rack into a carboy (leave sediment behind) and fit airlock.
7. Allow secondary fermentation to finish and sediment to settle.
8. Rack into bottles and fit stoppers.

Extract from "Mad About Mead" by Pamela Stence