

Meads (Honeywine)

As honey is likely the oldest and easiest form of sugar available to man and as such mead is probably among the oldest if not the oldest alcoholic drink. The earliest archeological evidence for mead dates to 2000 BC, and honey was part of the earliest known fermentation from ~9,000 BC. Mead has played an important role in the beliefs and mythologies of many people across the world throughout history being the drink of both gods and men and has been made wherever honey can be found.

Making mead can be as simple as mixing water and honey, and then adding yeast. Quite often boiling of the mead is not necessary, and some meaderies do not heat or boil the honey as it can remove the delicate aromatics of the honey. Meads usually take a longer time to ferment than ales as while honey has a high sugar content, it lacks the other nutrients that yeast requires, resulting in a slower fermentation. Depending on the amount of honey used, fermentation can take several weeks, months or even a year to complete. Adding some yeast nutrient can speed up the fermentation, but many mead-makers agree that mead is always better after aging for a year or more.

Honey in itself is an amazing food, despite being a concentrated form of sugar most microorganisms do not grow in it. The flavors and aromas of the honey will vary on the source of the nectar, thus we see honey labeled as orange blossom, or wild clover, as they do have different qualities to them. A unique one is heather honey, which is said to have such a pungent and penetrating aroma that it will fill a room despite being in a close container. It is also odd in that if left undisturbed it becomes very thick, almost like Jell-O, until it is vigorously stirred upon which it behaves much like that of ordinary honey.

The sugars in honey are fructose and glucose; both are easily fermented by yeast. Honey is actually produced by bees as a food source for them, usually in cold weather or when fresh food sources are scarce. Bees go about collecting nectar from available sources and ingest the nectar. By regurgitating and ingesting the nectar a number of times until it is partially digested, bees convert the sucrose found in nectar into fructose and glucose as well as removing water. The hive works together in this process, until the final honey is achieved and stored in the honeycombs. Honey may be one food that we could not make ourselves without bees.

The final honey is roughly 82% sugar and 17% water, and can contain several amino acids, as well as citric, acetic, lactic and other organic acids. The types and amounts will vary from honey to honey.

There are as many types of meads as there are regions where it is made as many countries and cultures have their own traditions as to the honey and other ingredients that are used. The BJCP officially has three categories, each with three subcategories. When submitting a mead, the following must be specified; sweetness (dry, semi-sweet, sweet), carbonation, strength (hydromel, standard, sack), honey variety and any special ingredients.

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BJCP Mead Categories

- 24. Traditional Meads
 - 24A. Dry (FG: 0.990 – 1.010)
 - 24B. Semi-sweet (FG: 1.010 – 1.025)
 - 24C. Sweet (FG: 1.025 – 1.050)
- 25. Melomel (fruit meads)
 - 25A. Cyser (apple cider and honey)
 - 25B. Pyment (grape juice and honey)
 - 26C. Other fruit melomels
- 26. Other Meads
 - 26A. Metheglin (spiced or herb mead)
 - 26B. Braggot (honey and malt)
 - 26C. Open category meads

OG:	hydromel	1.035 - 1.080	ABV:	hydromel	3.5 - 7.5%	FG:	dry	0.990 - 1.010
	standard	1.080 - 1.120		standard	7.5 - 14%		semi- sweet	1.010 - 1.025
	sack	1.120 - 1.170		sack	14 - 18%		sweet	1.025 - 1.050

There are numerous other variants of meads, many countries and regions have their own traditions as to the ratio of honey to water and what ingredients are used in addition to honey and water; lemons, mulberries, rose hips, wine vinegar, etc...

There is a honey jack, where the mead is frozen and the ice crystals are removed, similar to how an eisbock or apple jack is made.

Tonight's Meads

Commercial

- Viking Blood made by Dansk Mjød in Denmark. Made from honey with hops, hibiscus flowers and spices. 19% ABV.
- B Nektar's Miel de Garde, a traditional mead made from orange blossom honey, aged 18 months in oak barrels. 14% ABV.
- B Nektar's Zombie Killer, a cherry cyser made from tart cherry juice, apple cider, and star thistle honey. ~6% ABV.

Homebrewed

- Two blueberry melomels and a spiced braggot.

Suggested Reading

- Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers by Stephen Harrod Buhner
- The Compleat Meadmaker by Ken Schramm
- Making Wild Wines & Meads by Pattie Vargas & Rich Gulling