

Chapter 7

Beer

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Seeing how the brewing process works
 - ▶ Knowing the lineup of beer types
 - ▶ Avoiding the sun and keeping it cool
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Basically, *beer* is an alcoholic beverage that's fermented and brewed from barley, hops, water, and yeast (along with corn and rice in some recipes). Beer has been brewed for thousands of years, and today drinkers the world over enjoy thousands of different varieties of beer. The United States has more than 1,200 *microbrews* (made by small, independent brewers) alone. Germany brags of having nearly 1,300 breweries.

Beer enjoys the distinction of coming to the Americas on the *Mayflower* and, in fact, seems to have played a part in the Pilgrims' decision to land at Plymouth Rock rather than farther south as intended. A journal (now in the U.S. Library of Congress) written by one of the passengers states in an entry from 1620 that the *Mayflower* landed at Plymouth because "we could not now take time for further search or consideration, our victuals being much spent, especially our beer. . . ."

The first commercial brewery in America was founded in New Amsterdam (New York City) in 1613. Many patriots owned their own breweries, among them General Israel Putnam and William Penn. Thomas Jefferson was also interested in brewing and made beer at Monticello. George Washington even had his own brew house on the grounds of Mount Vernon, and his handwritten recipe for beer — dated 1757 and taken from his diary — is still preserved.

How Beer Is Made

The beer-brewing process begins with pure water, corn grits, and malted barley. Malted barley is the basic ingredient and is often referred to as the “soul of beer.” It contributes to the color and characteristic flavor of beer. *Malted* simply means that the barley has been steeped or soaked in water and allowed to *germinate*, or grow.

Brewing beer is a step-by-step process:

1. The corn grits and malt are cooked and blended to create mash.
2. A sugary liquid, called *wort*, is extracted from the mash. (The remaining solid portion of the mash, the brewer’s grain, is sold as feed.)
3. The wort is transferred to the brew kettles, where it’s boiled and hops are added. *Hops* are responsible for the rich aroma and the delicate bitterness in beer.
4. The wort then moves to the wort cooler.
5. Sterile air is added next, along with yeast, which converts sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide. The wort moves to fermentation tanks for a carefully controlled time period.

Brewers can use two different categories of yeast: bottom and top.

- ✓ **Bottom yeast** settles to the bottom of the tank after converting all the sugar, and the resulting beer is a lager.
- ✓ **Top yeast** rises to the top of the tank when it’s done with the sugar, and the beer it produces is an ale.

Types of Beer

You’ve probably seen some of the following terms on beer labels, or maybe you’ve heard them in beer commercials:

- ✔ **Ale** is top-fermented beer. It's a little bitter, usually tastes hoppy, and generally has a higher alcohol content than lagers.
- ✔ **Bitter** beer is a strong ale — usually English — with, as the name implies, a bittersweet taste.
- ✔ **Bock** beer is a dark, strong, slightly sweet lager brewed from caramelized malt.
- ✔ **Ice** beer is brewed at colder-than-normal temperatures and then chilled to below freezing, forming crystals. The crystals are filtered out, leaving a smoother-tasting beer with a slightly higher alcohol content.
- ✔ **Lager** is a bottom-fermented beer stored at very low (cold) temperatures for a long period of time (several months). The word *lager* is German for “to store.”
- ✔ **Lambic** beer is brewed in Belgium. Ingredients such as peaches, raspberries, cherries, and wheat are added during the brewing process.
- ✔ **Light** beer has fewer calories and less alcohol.
- ✔ **Low-calorie** beer has even fewer calories than light beer (and some would say even less flavor). These beers generally have 55 to 65 calories per serving.
- ✔ **Malt liquor** is fermented at a higher temperature than other beers, which results in a higher alcohol content.
- ✔ **Pilsner** is a light, hoppy, dry lager.
- ✔ **Sake** is beer brewed and processed from rice. (Some consider sake a wine.) Sake is served warm or at room temperature.
- ✔ **Stout** is an ale produced from heavily roasted barley. It's darker in color and has a slightly bitter flavor.
- ✔ **Trappist** beer is brewed in Belgium or the Netherlands by Trappist monks. It contains high levels of alcohol and is usually dark in color.
- ✔ **Wheat** beer is made, as you may expect, with wheat. It's usually garnished with a lemon and sometimes raspberry syrup.

Storing and Serving Suggestions

In the United States, beer is served cold (40 degrees Fahrenheit). Lower temperatures tend to dull the taste, so consider 40 degrees the lower limit. Store beer away from sunlight, or you get *skunked* beer, which is never pleasant. Most beers now have labels that say when they were brewed or when to remove them from the shelf.

For much more information on beer, check out *Beer For Dummies* by Marty Nachel and Steve Ettlinger (Wiley). If you're interested in actually making your own beer, grab Marty Nachel's *Homebrewing For Dummies* (Wiley).