

DIY Suds in the Valley of Saints

Frosties—suds—brewskies—oat sodas: Call it what you will, it's beer, and as plenty of folks here in the Valley of Zion are aware, it's even more fun when you make it yourself

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
PAX RASMUSSEN



Mark Alston, owner of the Beer Nut and the Bayou, and home brewing enthusiast.

the Bayou, a downtown beer pub. Right now, he estimates over 1,000 active home-brewers shop his store alone. Maybe more than a few Utahns would agree with poet A.E. Housman: "Malt does more than Milton can / To justify God's ways to man."

Why brew your own?

Simply, taste. Let's go back 20 years and look for a decent beer in Salt Lake. There were a couple of local breweries around making a reasonable brew, but for the most part the only beer available at grocery stores were light lagers such as Budweiser and Michelob. For the beer connoisseur, these beers have little to offer. For anything else, you had to make a trip to the liquor store, where the typical markup on beer was around 85%. Soon though, microbrews like those put out by Squatters, Uintah and Wasatch started becoming readily available in the supermarkets, but still the alcohol content was restricted to 3.2% by weight, 4.0% by volume. A truly flavorful beer can't be had at three point. "It's really all about flavor," says local home-brewer Kevin Farnsworth, while buying supplies for his next batch at the Beer Nut. "You can't get a full-bodied beer at 3.2. So you can either go to the liquor store and pay a fortune, or brew it yourself." Farnsworth agrees higher alcohol content is really is secondary to getting a good mug of suds.

And more than just taste, there's variety. Many excellent beers can be found at the liquor store, but for a true beer-lover, the selection is terri-

A sense of innovation and quest for perfection runs throughout the beer-brewing community and is a strong force keeping the hobby active and growing.

In spite of, or maybe because of, Utah's official attitude toward booze, home-brewing in Salt Lake is a popular hobby—even with so many microbreweries, such as Uintah and Wasatch, pumping out tasty cold ones, it seems everyone knows someone that cooks up their own suds. According to Mark Alston, owner of the Beer Nut, the largest of Salt Lake's three brewing supply stores, popularity of the hobby is rising. Around 11 years ago, Alston noticed the growing trend of home-brewing in Salt Lake City and started the Beer Nut, and more recently

bly limited. "You can't get anything even like a Belgian beer at the liquor store," says Alston, shaking his head. "Also, there are a lot of great rye beers, but they're just not imported here." The solution? Make them yourself. Right now, Alston is working with Rauchbeir, which is a German beer with smoked malt. Thick and hearty, this beer is something that only home-brewers in Salt Lake are likely to get a pint of.

Gene Leavitt, another local beer brewer, brews primarily for a sense of involvement and control. "It's great to drink a beer that you've made," he says. His favorite batch so far was a dark Bohemian ale, but it turned out a little too dark. "It's like the espresso of beers," he laughs. "I want a beer to my liking. I loved that beer, but I want to mess around with it, get it a bit lighter but keep the same flavor." This sense of innovation and quest for perfection runs throughout the beer-brewing community and is a strong force keeping the hobby active and growing.

We've heard about the benefits of drinking red wine. Research shows that beer, especially dark, wholesome beer, may provide many of the same benefits. A 2002 Kaiser-Permanente study of over 120,000 men showed beer delivers protection against heart attacks, stroke hypertension, diabetes and dementia to a greater extent than red wine, white wine or spirits. In addition, unfiltered home-brewed beer is loaded with B vitamins that help the liver process the alcohol. However, beware the calories: Even one light beer per night adds up to 10 extra pounds after a year. (See WWW.REALBEER.COM/EDU for more on the good and bad of beer and health.)

It's easy, and no, you won't go to jail

Several misconceptions surround home-brewing, among which are difficulty, cost and legality. When I handed a bottle of my first batch of home-brew to my former roommate, he asked, "Isn't this illegal?" Then he wanted to know how I could afford all the equipment.

Even in Utah, a state known for its stringent alcohol laws and policies, home-brewers aren't going to jail for mixing up their own suds. While not expressly legal, according to Alston, no state law deals specifically with



You can start your new hobby for about \$70 worth of equipment, and have a finished batch in just a few weeks.

home-brewing. Federal law permits up to 100 gallons per person to be brewed annually, far more than most people would even consider. A few years back, Alston formed a group to try to pass a bill with the state legislature which would specifically allow home-brewing in Utah. It was tabled in committee (effectively killing it), but Alston says it had a lot of support in the community. "The local police and sheriff's department supported the bill," he says. "They figured that home-brewing encourages people to keep their drinking at home, rather than out on the roads." While no Utah law forbids home-brewing, the laws regarding licensing for commercial production state that any producer of an alcoholic beverage must have a license. "The law regards commercial production," says Alston, but it is a bit vague, which is why they felt legislation was a good idea. To date, there have been no attempts to prosecute home-brewers.

Legalities aside, home-brewing is easy! "If you can cook Ramen, you can make beer," laughs Alston. He's right: Pretty much all that's needed to make a your own batch of oat soda is a big stock pot, a thermometer and something you can seal up to let it ferment

in. The local brew supply stores sell malt extracts, which save the beginning home-brewer the hassle of boiling out the sugars from the grain. With a good extract, anyone can make a great first batch of beer. A kit with all the necessary equipment to start brewing can cost as little as about \$70. And it's a creative hobby: Once comfortable with extracts, the more advanced brewer can move on to making teas with grains for added flavoring and finally to whole-grain brewing, which requires hours of careful boiling to get a good malt.

The hardest part is making sure everything is clean. Since making beer naturally involves letting sugary stuff sit in a warm place, any unauthorized bacteria can mean trouble. "The most common mistake is improper sanitization," says Jamie Burnham, manager at The Beer Nut. "Any bacteria in there will cause problems. It won't make you sick, but it'll make your beer taste bad." Besides contamination, sterilizing with improper chemicals, such as bleach, can leave off-flavors and funky odors in your brew.

Variations

Once you've made a few batches of home-brew, you might want to try making wine, too! While a bit more difficult, especially regarding sanitation procedures, making a great wine isn't all that hard either, especially since the same equipment can be used. Primarily the biggest difference is time. A batch of beer can take as little as two weeks to be drinkable, whereas wine takes at least three months—preferably a year or more.

Nowadays the same grape juices that award winning wineries use can be bought in kits for the home winemaker. "Winemaking is making a huge surge," says Alston. A few of Alston's friends have even won awards using the kits in their basements. "The limited-edition kits are great. They don't tell you where the juice is coming from to protect the wineries, but they're always sourced from a great place," he says. The hobby is really picking up, and there are many local and regional contests. (Visit WWW.BEERTOWN.ORG for more information on home-brewing and winemaking contests.)

continued

A Brewing Primer

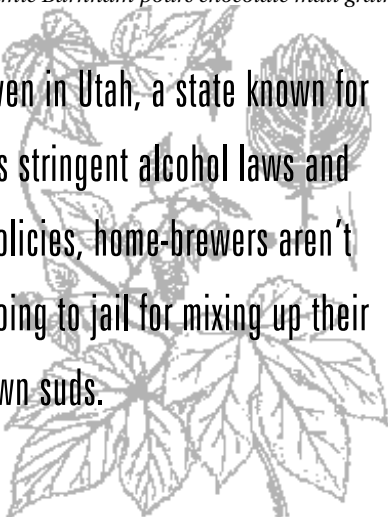
As easy as it is, it's good to have an idea of where to go. As long as you keep a few easy steps in mind, a great first batch of beer could be only weeks away.

BY PAX RASMUSSEN



Jamie Burnham pours chocolate malt grain for a customer.

Even in Utah, a state known for its stringent alcohol laws and policies, home-brewers aren't going to jail for mixing up their own suds.



Equipment Needed (about \$70)

- A 6.5 gallon fermenter with lid (glass carboy)
- A 5 gallon priming/bottling bucket
- An airlock (so carbon dioxide can get out and oxygen can't get in)
- A siphon (for bottling)
- A hydrometer (so you can tell when it's ready to bottle)
- A bottle brush (gotta keep things clean)
- A bottle-capper
- A cooking thermometer
- A strip thermometer (like those used for fishtanks)
- Sanitizer

NOTE: To make non-alcoholic brew: Heat up your beer after it's done fermenting (being careful not to get it hot enough to kill the yeast). The little bit of alcohol produced during the bottling/carbonating stage will only put your suds at about one quarter of a percent (0.25).

To up the final alcohol content, some people add extra sugar to feed the yeast a little more. According to an article published at www.BYO.COM (Brew Your Own), you can get a smoother effect with honey. You can also replace sugar with honey to provide the fermentation at bottling that carbonates the beer.

STEP ONE

Boil the Water

In order to make sure your water doesn't have any chlorine in it, it's important to boil it for at least 15 minutes.

STEP TWO

Steep the Grain

If your recipe includes any specialty grain for flavoring, add the grains to a mesh bag and steep them in hot water (about 150 degrees) for about 40 minutes. Just wait for the boiled water to cool down to the proper temperature (take 3 of the 5 gallons out and keep aside to be added later—you only want to work with about 2 gallons for now) and add the grains. Turn the stove on low and keep an eye on the temperature. Squeeze the water out of the bag of grain when it's done and throw away the grain.

STEP THREE

Cook the Extract

Take the water off the heat and add the malt extract (it's a good idea to soak the can of extract in warm water for a few minutes first, in order to make it pour out easier. It's thick!). Stir the pot constantly while adding the extract. Put the mixture (now called wort) back on the heat and boil (usually for about 45 minutes).

Depending on the recipe you use, hops might be included. Unless otherwise directed, add the package of hops about two minutes from the end of the 45 minute boil.

STEP FOUR

Cool the Wort

It's important to cool the wort before transferring it to the fermenter. Sloshing the wort is very bad while it is hot, since it can oxidize and make your beer taste like cardboard. An extra step that helps make a tastier beer is to put the pot in a bucket of ice or cold water to cool it faster. It needs to be 70 degrees or cooler. Since from now on the water isn't going to be heated to boiling, it's very important not to let anything un-sanitized come in contact with the wort.

STEP FIVE

Adding the Yeast

Boil about six ounces of water and then let it cool down to about 100 degrees. Add the yeast and stir. Set aside.

STEP SIX

Aeration

While hot wort should never be splashed around, it's important to mix some oxygen into the wort before sealing it up to ferment (the yeast need it to survive). Pour the wort into the plastic fermenter, then top it off to the five gallon mark with the rest of the boiled water that has completely cooled. Splash it into the wort vigorously. Attach the lid and rock the bucket strongly to splash it around for about five minutes. Then add the yeast mixture. Reattach the lid and affix the airlock.

STEP SEVEN

Take a Gravity Reading

Use a sanitized glass to remove about a half cup of wort. Put it into the tube that came with the hydrometer (about three-fourths full). Put the hydrometer into the tube and record the reading (follow the hydrometer directions). You will use this reading later to make sure the beer has completely fermented.

STEP EIGHT

Fermenting

Between 24-48 hours later, you will notice bubbling in the airlock. This means fermentation is underway. Also, you will begin to notice the smell of beer coming from the airlock. Wait till the bubbling has stopped (three to seven days) and then wait another three days and take a gravity reading again. It should be about a fourth of the original reading. Wait another two days and take another reading. If it hasn't changed, your beer is ready to bottle!


STEP NINE

Bottle the beer

Make sure to clean your bottles well using a bottle brush. All equipment now has to be completely sanitized, because risk of contamination at this stage is high. Boil the priming sugar in about a pint of water and add to the priming/bottling bucket. Transfer beer from the fermenter to the bottling bucket using a siphon and hose. Splash the beer as little as possible. Using the spigot if your bottling bucket has one, or the siphon and hose if it doesn't, fill bottles to about one

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Don't know the difference between a lager and an ale?

Here's some definitions that might help you out when you're ordering a mug, three sheets to the wind.

Ale: A room-temperature fermented beer made with a top fermenting yeast. Usually ales are hearty, thick and sometimes fruity.

Brown Ale: A British style ale made with a caramel malt (crystal malt)—very lightly hopped.

Black malt: Heavily roasted malted barley added to stouts and other dark beers to add a burnt, bitter flavor.

Black & Tan: Equal mixtures of dark and pale beers (i.e. porter and pilsner).

Chocolate malt: Don't be fooled, this has nothing to do with chocolate. Like a black malt, but roasted lighter to an even chocolate color.

Dunkelweizen: A dark wheat ale (like a hefeweizen, but darker).

Hefeweizen: A light, unfiltered wheat ale. Usually quite fruity.

India Pale Ale (IPA): A strong, bitter, highly hopped ale. Originally brewed for British troops stationed in India, this beer was made to survive long ocean voyages.

Irish Red Ale: A sweet, thick, sometimes buttery beer. Noted for its reddish color.

Lager: A beer made with a bottom-fermenting yeast. These beers are fermented at very cold temperatures and are usually light, crisp and refreshing. Most 'American' beers are lagers (i.e. Budweiser).

Marzenbier: A very hearty German ale, brewed especially strong to last through the summer. Generally consumed at the end of the harvest season (Octoberfest).

Malt: Barley which has been moistened, allowed to germinate (sprout) and then dried.

Oatmeal Stout: A stout brewed with oats. Very hearty and full bodied.

Pale Ale: An amber colored beer brewed with pale malts. These are like bitters, but lighter and hoppier.

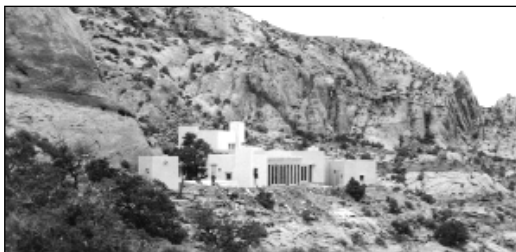
Pilsner: Any light, hoppy ale.

Porter: A very dark, top-fermented beer. Originally intended for porters and other hard workers in London. Made with roasted, unmalted barley, it is considered to be more nutritious than other ales.

Rauchbier: A very dark bottom-fermented beer. The malts are dried over an open fire, giving the beer a smoky flavor.

Steam Beer: A beer made using a very complicated method of both top and bottom-fermenting methods. Originally made in California during the gold rush. Anchor Brewing holds the trademark for the name of this beer.

Stout: The darkest of beers, stout is a very hoppy ale made with roasted, unmalted barley.



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Brewing Primer *continued*

inch from the top. Cap using the bottle capper. Remember to sanitize even your bottle caps! Set beer aside in a cool, dark place and allow to age for at least a week, although the beer will be best after a month or so. Now your first batch of beer is ready to go!

Beernut India Pale Ale (American Style)

Formulated with the help of the original brewer for The Desert Edge Brewery, Peter Kruge, this recipe is what Desert Edge's Utah Pale Ale (a spin of on the ever popular India Pale Ales) would be if they were not constrained by the 3.2 alcohol laws. Hoppy and full-flavored, at 6-7% alcohol, it's a perfect beer for summer and fall brewing. Recipe courtesy of The Beer Nut.

- 6 lbs Coopers Light Malt Extract
- 2 lbs Munich Malt
- 0.25 lb 80°L Crystal (whole grains)

- 1 oz Cascade hops (4.7% Alpha) boiled 75 min.
- 1.5 oz Cascade hops boiled 30 min.
- .75 oz Cascade hops boiled 15 min.
- 1 oz Cascade dry-hop
- White Labs California Ale Yeast
- 5 gallons boiled water

Brew Supply Stores in Salt Lake:

The Beer Nut
801-531-8182
1200 S. State
<http://www.beernut.com>

Art's Brewing Supplies
801-533-8029
642 South 250 West
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