
Seasonal Brewing

Introduction

We don't all have temperature controlled rooms but we all go through the huge seasonal variations in weather! This document attempts to review the strategies we can use in each season to produce optimum beer. You should also read the "Yeast and Fermentation Management" document for more detail in making clear, clean, tasty beers. This document assumes the brewer does not have a refrigerator or deep cellar etc.

As you will see, my philosophy is to turn each season to advantage rather than fight it with heating pads etc. Sadly, the Australian summer rather defeats that philosophy and to brew in summer one needs refrigeration or ice. I am very wary of heating pads and belts for use on the Adelaide plains:- I have used both and 'cooked' my beer (had it fermenting at 30°C!) with both types of device!

This document is written mainly for Adelaide and South Australian brewers. Those living in the Adelaide Hills or rural SA or some other location need to adapt these notes to their particular climate—for overseas readers of this document Adelaide is in South Australia and enjoys a "Mediterranean climate" with cool wet winters and warm dry summers.

Fall

An old English word for the season between winter and summer and one I prefer using.

By mid-March while the days might still be sunny and warm the nights are getting longer and cooler. It is now perfectly possible to start brewing some small milds, bitters and pale ales which will soon be ready for drinking fresh. To keep the fermenting beer from getting too hot during the day we can just place our fermenter on the floor of the shed/laundry and, as the nights get cooler start wrapping the fermenter at night in an old blanket or coat etc—it is better to have a beer fermenting at a constant 24°C than one fermenting at 26°C during the day and 16°C at night!.

By late March to early April it will normally be cool enough to brew a big beer or two: winter warmers, barleywines, belgian tripels and Christmas Ales. These big beers would ferment too strongly in warmer weather raising the temperature in the fermenter even further.

At this time of year I put on the shelves the Series 2 Packs of 'Old Jockstrap' strong scottish ale, 'Don't Fuggle with me IPA' pale ale, the 'Chief Strange Bull bitter' with its 7 hop additions and 'Christmas Ale.' All strong, all-malt well-hopped ales that can mature over a few months or a couple of years! The "Rye Pale Ale" part mash Pack also makes an appearance—pale beers are so hard to ferment properly in summer!

When the maximum temperature is in the 18–20°C range you can start brewing wheat beer, preferably using a liquid wheat beer yeast though I do stock the Saf ale WB 06 dry wheat yeast. Pitch the wheat beers with the wort at 12°C and ferment no warmer than 18°C. This way you will get beers with a lovely subtle clove aroma and subdued fruitiness while pitching/fermenting rather warmer will lead to overpowering banana, fruitsalad and bubblegum phenolics, yuck! Again, as

the season progresses and the weather gets cooler we can brew bigger and bigger beers—hefeweizen→dunkelweizen→weizenbocks and I will put the appropriate Packs on the shelf at that time.

Winter

Winter is the time above all to brew lagers! Nature has given you this big lager 'fridge with the blue ceiling! Unlike ale yeasts an exceptionally cold winter night won't make the lager yeast drop out. I recommend the Saflager w34/70 and the Diamond dry lager yeasts but the liquid yeast offers more choice. Pitch the wort at 25°C, same as ales late in the afternoon and overnight the wort should cool down to below at least 14°C then keep the fermenting wort at below 14°C temperatures, below 12°C is better.

Again, I will put lager Packs on the shelf by the start of winter and will keep them on the shelf past mid-winter. Lo and Brau, Jeeves Preferred Pilsner and the range of Part Mash Packs

Ales are more difficult to ferment in winter and some heating devices may be necessary, though it will be better to use ale yeasts that can ferment cool, put the fermenter on a table and wrap it up well with old blankets and the like. If you do use a heating wrap the fermenter up well and use a thermostat to ensure the ferment will happen at a safe and constant temperature—and use minimum electricity.

Please! Winter is paradoxically the time when beers are 'cooked' by leaving a heating belt or pad on during a warm day. In Adelaide heating devices really are needed only during the night! However, the winters have been getting colder so a heating device, used with a thermostat or a timer may become necessary even on the Adelaide Plains!

As the winter progresses you can brew bigger lagers such as doppelbocks.

Spring

Early spring with its nice cool days is the time to brew some nice beers for summer! We will make these beers a bit hoppy so that by the time summer arrives the bitterness has declined a bit, making these beers more luscious and of the right bitterness for the style. Styles that can be brewed now a bigger pale, mild or brown ale and wheat beers. Winter warmers for the next winter can also be brewed now for extended maturation, as long as this maturing ale can be stored at temperatures that will not exceed 20°C.

As spring starts giving way to summer and temperatures rise we should brew smaller beers to help keep ferment temperatures low. If December is moderately cool a last wheat beer or two—great summer drinking and should be drunk fresh but impossible to brew in summer without a brew 'fridge!

Summer

My personal philosophy says “summer is the time to drink beer, not brew it” and I have two fridges I could ferment and cool condition beer in!

As the mercury climbs and daytime temperatures exceed 30°C for days at a stretch brewing becomes all but impossible. However, if you are desperate for beer and really

do not have the money or space for a fridge here are a few things to consider:

1. Big beers will likely ferment fast, making the fermenting wort even hotter—so keep the beers small
2. Since we cannot control the fermentation temperature all the time the ferment is likely to get too hot putting some off-tastes into our beer. In a pale beer these will really stand out, so brew darker beers, the darker brown ales, milds, dark ales, stouts and porters. *A little bit of dark grain hides a multitude of sins!*
3. Use of ice can be a big help but the ice will melt quickly in the middle of the day when it is getting really hot and we are at work and can't add fresh ice! So the use of ice must be 'smart.'
 - 3.1. Don't add ice to water! The ice will melt cooling the water only a tiny bit
 - 3.2. Use big blocks of ice—a 3L fruit juice bottle filled about 3/4 full then frozen is ideal. Ice cubes are useless.
 - 3.3. Use insulation—put two or three of these 3L bottles around the fermenter placed in a styrofoam container then wrap the whole lot up in a blanket, old duna etc. Change the ice 2–3 times a day.
 - 3.4. The ideal way is to buy a '100can cooler' which is like a soft round eski. Put the fermenter in the cooler, place 3 bottles of ice around it and zip up the cooler. This way you only need to change the ice twice a day. This cooler is not a 'fridge, if you forget to change the ice one morning the ferment will get hot, so still brew smaller, darker beers.
 - 3.5. Dextrose being a monosaccharide is what the yeast like best of all. Use all malt beers. The easiest is a can of kit and a can of liquid malt.
 - 3.6. Don't let the beer stand around on the 'yeast cake' that forms during the ferment—this will cause autolysis and put vegemite flavor in your beer, again very yuck in a pale ale but unnoticeable in a stout or porter. Rack once or twice during the ferment and bottle as soon as possible.
 - 3.7. Despite all warnings you want to brew a bigger beer? Use incremental feeding, adding one type of fermentable when the previous type has nearly finished fermenting

General

If you can brew up enough in spring then summer brewing can be avoided and you should be able to brew in spring, fall and winter without needing to employ electrical heating or cooling except for those in the Adelaide Hills, etc. This should be your preferred strategy.

Now, if you have a cellar that you can store your bottles in (needn't be your cellar, that of a relative will be fine—whether the relative will be inclined to dip into your beer store is your problem! Hint: store it bulk, in cubes or kegs!

Without such a cellar you have the problem of preventing autolysis in your bottled or bulk beer in summer! You need a lot of yeast and a lot of heat to get autolysis but this is what you have on the bottom of a beer fermented in summer! So, rack the beer one more time when the ferment is finished, let it stand a week then bottle to minimise the amount of yeast on the bottom of your bottles.