

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Making Mead



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## WHAT IS MEAD?

Mead is honey wine. It is made when honey is diluted and allowed to ferment. Mead is believed to have been the first alcoholic beverage, likely discovered by accident. Because honey is hygroscopic, it will absorb water from the air. When the moisture level of unpasteurized honey rises above 18%, honey will ferment because of the presence of naturally occurring osmophilic yeast spores. In time, and in the presence of enough water, the fermented honey will become mead. Mead has been recorded in numerous cultures and civilizations, including Ancient Egypt, Babylonia and throughout Greek Mythology. It is the ease with which mead can be produced that has solidified its place throughout history.

## HOW DOES MEAD COMPARE TO OTHER ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES?

Alcoholic beverages fall into five classifications: beer, wine, fortified wines, cordials and liqueurs, and distilled spirits. Mead, with an average alcohol content of about 12%, falls into the category of still wines.

## HOW IS MEAD PRODUCED?

To make mead, honey is diluted with water to create the solution mead makers call "must." Nutrients and yeast are then added to the must and allowed to ferment. Changes in the type of honey, yeast or other ingredients chosen can dramatically change the mead produced, and provide for a great deal of variety and creativity on the part of mead makers.

## CAN ANY TYPE OF HONEY BE USED TO MAKE MEAD?

Because honey is derived from the nectar of flowers, honey varies greatly depending upon its floral source. Honey can range in color from water white to dark amber depending upon the source. Clover and alfalfa produce a light honey, whereas buckwheat honey is dark like molasses. Flavor also varies with floral source. Lighter honeys typically have a much milder flavor than dark honeys.

Because of these variations, the flavor of the mead produced is dependent upon the type of honey used. Lighter honeys provide a minimal contribution of strong flavors whereas darker honeys produce more robustly flavored mead. When choosing the type of honey to be used, and the amount of honey flavor that will be imparted to the mead, consider that the honey will be diluted to about 22% honey solids (from 82%).

## WHAT IS SPARKLING MEAD?

Mead can be manufactured as a sparkling beverage in the same manner as Champagne and other wines that contain carbon dioxide. Sparkling mead requires two fermentations. The first is conducted the normal way in a cask or carboy, and the resulting mead is allowed to clear and age for a few months. After it is clear, the new mead is placed in Champagne-type bottles which can withstand greater internal pressure. Sugar, nutrients and yeast are added and the second fermentation takes place in the bottle. This produces additional alcohol and carbon dioxide.

## HOW LONG SHOULD MEAD FERMENT?

Some fermented honey beverages will be completed in just six weeks. More typical batches, however, are clouded for a year or more. Most meads reach their peak flavor and taste after about eight months and then decline thereafter. Most recipes will specify the optimum extent of fermentation required.

## HOW LONG MUST MEAD AGE?

Because fermentation rates vary for each mead formulation, aging varies greatly too. It takes at least six months to ferment and age mead, though some recipes call for a year or more.

## WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO ADD NUTRIENTS?

Although honey provides yeast with plenty of sugars to feed upon, honey lacks the nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium that allow the fermentation to continue in an efficient manner.