MEAD

Plants make nectar – bees make honey – mazers make mead

- Melomel: mead fermented or flavoured with fruit
- Cyser: melomel made with apples, apple juice or cider
- Pyment: melomel made with grapes or grape juice
- Braggot: mead with malt added
- Metheglin: mead flavoured with herbs or spices
- Show Mead: just honey, water, yeast, nutrients

Mead is notorious more long and difficult fermentations, especially stuck fermentations. Honey is very low in nutrients, notably free amino nitrogen (FAN). Most mead musts contain 5 to 15 ppm of FAN, well below the 300 ppm required for an alcoholic beverage destined for 12% ABV. The best solution is a combination of yeast nutrient and diammonium phosphate (DAP). Research has shown that mean ferments best when the nutrients are fed in a controlled fashion, in a staggered nutrient addition. 50% when you pitch the yeast, 30% at active fermentation, and the remaining 20% at fermentation mid-point. Mead made with this method will have a very normal (albeit slow) fermentation and require less aging before reaching maturity.

All of the older mead making books instruct you to boil the must vigorously before fermentation. These days, many award-winning meadmakers advocate the “no boil method”. They claim that boiling drives off many of the lighter aromatics and result in a poorer quality mead. If you are ultra-paranoid about sanitation, you could add in one Campden tablet per gallon of liquid, let it sit overnight, then pitch the yeast the next day.

Just like with beer, the type of yeast you choose can greatly affect the final product. If you choose a champagne yeast, your mead will be drier and have a higher alcohol level. If you want a sweeter mead, consider Wyeast 3184 (sweet mead variety) or Lalvin D-47 as a dry yeast. Lalvin 71B is a good choice for mead, as it undergoes malo-lactic fermentation reducing the perceived acidity of the mead, producing a rounder, less grating mouthfeel and requiring less aging.

Mead (especially sweeter varities) are notorious for throwing off a lot of sediment, even after a year of bulk aging with numerous rackings. You may want to consider using a clarifier. Sparkalloid is a popular choice for mead.

Just like with wine, using oak can greatly improve your mead. Oak contributes vanillin and tannins, adding fullness and complexity to the mouthfeel. An ounce of oak chips for 2 to 3 weeks should be adequate, and be careful not to overdo it.

If you’re really serious about your mead, you can consider getting an acid titration kit to determine the total acidity (TA) level. Most people prefer meads with TA levels of 0.5 to 0.8 mg / 100 mL (0.5 to 0.8%) so if you’re outside of this range you could consider adjusting it.

Straight Sweet Mead

5 US gallons/19 litres
OG = 1.111
FG = 1.033
ABV = 10.1%

15 pounds clover or wildflower honey
4.5 grams yeast nutrient & 4.5 grams DAP (at pitching)
2.8 grams yeast nutrient & 2.8 grams DAP (at active fermentation)
1.8 grams yeast nutrient & 1.8 grams DAP (at mid-point of fermentation)
5 Campden tablets, crushed (optional)
Lalvin D-47 dry yeast
Acid blend (optional)
Sparkalloid (optional)

Mix honey with enough water to give 19 litres. Add first dose of yeast nutrient & DAP. If desired, use Campden tablets to sanitize must, letting it sit overnight. Re-hydrate yeast, then pitch. If you have the ability to oxygenate the must, do so. When the mead is at active fermentation, add in the second dose of nutrient & DAP. When half of the fermentables have been used up, add in the third and final dose of nutrient & DAP. After fermentation is complete, add acid blend and Sparkalloid if needed. Bulk age for up to one year before bottling, racking as needed.