

Making Mead (traditional method)

Making mead is a two-day process. Two days plus a few years. The first day is the most important.

Day 1

Assemble the Equipment

Make sure you have all the things you need before starting. Most of what you need, except for the yeast, can be found in most households.

Measuring Cup

1 packet Red Star Premier Cuvee Champagne Yeast, or other champagne yeast

Commercial Yeast Nutrient (2 Tsp.) or

2 Teaspoons Epsom Salts *or*

1 Tsp Epsom Salts *and* 1 Teaspoon DAP (diammonium phosphate)

1 Tablespoon Fruit Fresh *or*,

1 Tablespoon Lemon Juice or 2 slices of lemon or orange

Raisins or Craisins

1 Gallon warm Honey, perhaps more

Thermometer

4 large soft drink cups

5 Gallon BPA-Free Bucket with lid

5 Gallon Water-Cooler type Jug

3 Gallons Warm Water

Fermentation Air Lock (or rubber band a balloon with a pin hole)

Funnel

Clear Plastic Hose

Clean the Equipment

There are many chemicals you can use to clean your equipment. I don't use chemicals because I worry about lingering residues. I use boiling water.

City Water

If you have city water, you need to remove any chlorine. Boiling will easily evaporate chlorine, but it may also remove beneficial chemicals as well. Let city water sit uncovered for 24 to 48 hours, stirring at least twice a day, before using it.

If you have a water softener at home, get your water from a source before it enters the softener. Most outside spigots are piped with non-softened water.

Set the water aside in a warm location.

Start the “Yeast Bomb”

Making a “yeast bomb” is the single most important thing you can do to insure success.

In a 1 quart container (I use large McDonald’s cups) mix 1/4 cup sugar in 1 cup of water at the temperature recommended on the yeast package, usually about 105 degrees.

Stir in the yeast and set aside in a warm location. Check it in a couple of hours. It should be a mass of brown bubbles reaching to the top of the container. If it is, in a second 1 quart container, mix 1/4 cup sugar in 1 cup of water at about 95 degrees. Mix the two containers by pouring back and forth, and set aside in a warm location.

When you have 2 containers that are a mass of brown bubbles, prepare two more quart containers with the sugar water mixture. Mix all 4 containers and set aside in a warm location.

In both the yeast starter and the “must” (the honey / water mixture), the ratio is roughly 4 to 1 to produce a sugar content of 25%. A lower sugar content will give you a weak fermentation, while a higher sugar content will stop fermentation all together.

Yeast Nutrients

Grape juice naturally provides the perfect combination of Yeast Nutrients, but to make Mead you need to supplement your “must.” You can use a commercial Yeast Nutrient or use what’s on hand in your kitchen.

A quart of 100% white grape juice from the store can provide everything needed for a 5 gallon batch, but if you are entering your Mead in a contest, technically you are making a “Pymment” type of mead.

The pollen in your honey is a natural yeast energizer, so unfiltered or “raw” honey is best.

A handful of Raisins or Craisins are a great supplement, but you need to remove the preservatives. Let them soak in water for an hour or two, changing the water twice.

Lemon Juice, or Fruit Fresh will add the acid the yeast needs, but add no more than 1 Tablespoon in a 5 gallon batch, or 2 slices of a lemon or orange.

Day 2 to about Day 10 and Beyond

Mixing

In the 5 Gallon Bucket mix 1 gallon of warmed honey into 3 gallons of warm water. Add the “yeast bomb” and yeast nutrients. Within an hour you should observe fermentation beginning, seeing numerous tiny bubbles on the surface of the must. The rate of fermentation will increase dramatically in the next few days. Lightly place a square of Osnaburg fabric and the cover on the bucket. Check it at least every day, looking for the fermentation rate to slow down.

Yeast needs oxygen, so stir the bucket every time you check the must.

Observation and Infusion

When you notice the fermentation rate beginning to slow down, remove the cover, pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey mixed with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm water. The must should bubble up a bit as the yeast welcomes the infusion of new food for it to digest. Replace the cover.

Continue adding honey until active fermentation ends. You will notice the must will stop reacting to the honey infusion. This can take from 10 days to a month.

Eventually the alcohol content will rise to the level where it starts killing the yeast and additional honey isn't utilized as quickly. Transfer the mixture into the water-cooler type jug. Top the jug with the fermentation air lock and set aside the must in a warm location. Fermentation will continue, sending fewer CO₂ bubbles into the lock. Let it sit a month or two or more before tasting.

At this stage let your taste buds determine if you need more honey. If the mead is too sweet for you, let it sit for a few months and taste it again and modify until it is to your liking. As it loses sweetness, the alcohol content will increase. If the mead is too dry, add more honey to taste.

After you stop feeding, let the mead age another 6 months to a year, then taste it. If you've over-sweetened the mead, just let it sit undisturbed for a year, and like magic you'll have a dryer mead with a higher alcohol content. If it's too dry, add more honey.

Mead is usually considered undrinkable until it's 3 years old. It will continue to improve with age. Some mead contests require 5 year old mead or older.

HINT: When you start making mead, learn how to successfully make the basic recipe before you start experimenting with other types of mead.

Super-Charged Mead Making

Making drinkable, award winning
mead in 1 year or less

Some researchers believe that mead takes so long to age into drinkability because the slow, protracted fermentation forms bad tasting chemicals. To avoid this problem, the faster the fermentation, the better. The result is a drinkable, and saleable, product in less time with greater profitability.

In order to make mead in a lot less time we need to push the primary fermentation as hard as we can. To do this, we will use the Staggered Nutrient Addition (SNA) method. Additional chemicals will be added to the “yeast bomb” with SNA additions whenever the measured sugar content drops 5 percent.

The SNA is the mixture of 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/2 teaspoon each of both DAP and Diastatic Malt Powder.

Follow the traditional mead making instructions for preparing mead. In addition to the equipment listed you will need:

Hydrometer for measuring sugar content

DAP (diammonium phosphate, a yeast nutrient)

Diastatic malt powder (a yeast energizer that naturally provides all the various nutrients needed for fast fermentation).

Sugar - because yeast metabolizes honey twice as fast when mixed with sugar. And, the diastatic malt powder increases the power of that chemical reaction.

In a 1 quart container (I use large McDonald’s cups) build your “yeast bomb” with 1 package of yeast, 1 cup water, 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 cup sugar, 1/4 teaspoon each of both DAP and Diastatic Malt Powder each. Follow the Yeast Bomb procedure in the traditional instructions to multiply your yeast.

In the 5 Gallon Bucket mix 1 Tlbs lemon juice or Fruit Fresh, most of the 1 gallon of warmed honey into 3 gallons of warm water. Check sugar content of your “must” (the honey/water mixture) with the Hydrometer. You are aiming for 23.5%. Resume adding honey until you reach 23.5%. If your reading is too high, add additional water until the reading lowers to 23.5%. Reserve any additional honey for later addition to the must.

Stir in the Yeast Bomb.

Place the must in a warm room (ideally between 72° and 78°). You should see active fermentation beginning in about an hour.

Stir the must thoroughly twice a day.

Every few days check the sugar content of the must. Add a SNA whenever the measured sugar content drops 5 percent.

When the alcohol content reaches 18% the yeasts die, fermentation stops, and your must will clear. It is now mead. Rack the mead into a clean bucket or water-cooler type jug, leaving the sediment on the bottom undisturbed.

Taste the mead. It may be drinkable.

If it's too sweet for your tastes, leave it to age 1 month and taste again.

If it's too dry, add additional honey and leave it for 1 month. Fermentation may resume at a slow rate and cloud the mead.

The mead should taste better each month. The longer it ages, the better it will be.

Wine Making Supplies

E. C. Kraus

<http://www.eckraus.com>

1-800-353-1906

Northern Brewer

<http://www.northernbrewer.com> 1-800-681-2739

Hobby Homebrew

<https://www.hobbyhomebrew.com>

1-(618)-203-8025

Annapolis Home Brew

836 Ritchie Hwy #19

(410) 975-0930

<http://www.annapolishomebrew.com>

Eastern Shore Wine & Beer Supply

1535 Northwood Dr, Salisbury, MD 21801

(410) 543-1790

<http://www.easternshorewineandbeersupply.com>

Types of Mead

Traditional Mead: A mead made from honey and water only

Hydromel: Weak, or watered mead

Sack Mead: Mead with a high alcohol content (over 14%)

Metheglin: Spiced mead made with spices and herbs

Sack Metheglin: Sweet spiced mead, similar to vermouth

Melomel: Mead made with fruit juice

Cyser: A melomel made with apple juice or cider

Pymment: A melomel made with grape juice

Morat: A melomel made with mulberries

Acerglyn: A mead made with honey and maple syrup

Brochet: A mead made with caramelized honey

Rough Mead Calculations

(sugar percentage of honey will vary)

1 lb Honey = 1 1/3 cups

1 lb Honey + 2 3/4 cups water = 1 Qt Mead

4 lbs Honey + 2 3/4 quarts water = 4 Qts Mead = 1 gallon Mead

12 lbs Honey + 2 3/4 gallons water = 16 Qts Mead = 4 gallons Mead

One Gallon Batch

3 cups Honey + 10 cups water = 1 gallon Mead