

### Teaching Homebrew

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There are over 1.2 million people in the United States brewing their own beer according to the American Homebrewers Association (AHA). With the U.S. population at 322 million, that puts us homebrewers at a scant 0.4% of the people in the U.S. However, with native Hawaiians (and other Pacific islanders) making up only 0.2% of the population, you're probably twice as likely to know a homebrewer as you are to know a Hawaiian. Now a Hawaiian that homebrews- that's super rare (Rex, you know you're special...).

The AHA periodically conducts a survey of homebrew supply shops in the U.S., the most recent report from the middle of last year. That report shows the same trend for homebrew shops as the craft beer business in general, with several years of double digit growth in sales. The opening rate for homebrew shops was up 48%, and revenue for all homebrew shops was up by 10%. So not only are there more shops opening, but each shop is doing more and more business. Notably, there was also a 24% increase in the sales of beginner homebrew kits. There are lots of folks brewing and a lot more checking it out for the first time.

The first Saturday in November each year is the official Teach a Friend to Homebrew Day. According to the AHA, there were events held that day in 10 different countries, and 48 of the states. The weather was a nice sunny 50 degrees with no rain in the Detroit area. However, since that weekend didn't work for some schedules, we planned an event a couple weeks later on November 21st. As luck would have it, that was the day our warm November slipped away and was replaced by a 36-degree day and the first snowstorm of the

season for Detroit.

The origins of this Whiteout Brew Day were at the monthly gathering of Farmington/Farmington Hills dads at **Farmington Brewing Co.**; seeing who was interested in participating in the event. As a homebrewer myself, I was excited about the idea of sharing the passion of trying to craft that perfect brew that matches the taste envisioned in your head. With a handful of interested folks, we started off with the task of recipe creation.

Recipe creation is one of the most rewarding and exciting parts of the homebrew process. Sometimes it starts with a flavor concept in your imagination, other times you try



to recreate a beer you had somewhere long ago and can no longer find it in the store. To successfully make recipes from scratch, it takes a lot of research (or have experience) with ingredients and their contributions to the beer and how to process them to get the desired effect. Proper balance between ingredients and combinations of them is an art much like a chef learns through a lot of experimentation. One great part of creating your own recipe is you get to tailor it exactly to your taste preferences.

Another common method of coming up with a recipe, again, like cooking, is to find one in a book or on the internet that sounds good. Almost all homebrew books include at least a couple of recipes, and some books are completely dedicated to recipes. A particularly popular recipe source is "clone recipes". These are recipes where homebrewers have tried to make a brew that tastes just like a popular commercial beer. Sometimes these recipes are built upon knowledge of specific ingredients the brewery has shared; others are just the work of taste detectives trying to recreate it.

With our group of first-time brewers, we opted for a recipe from a brewing book that wasn't a clone of anything, but the author's description sounded like a good reliable Stout

recipe. With recipe and ingredients in hand, the homebrew gear was unloaded at the brewery. Being outside in nature is a great perk of homebrewing, and brewing in a snowstorm is no different. In the summer, sitting out under a blue sky with the sun shining down is great relaxation. And in the winter while most people feel caged in and trapped inside, it's refreshingly peaceful to be outside all bundled up from the cold. With a small canopy tent set up in front of Farmington Brewing, we were able to keep the snow out of the boil kettle and keep us protected somewhat from the elements as we went out to check on the process from time to time. The brew day went smooth, and of course being able to warm up inside while having some fresh professional beer worked very well.

The last stage of homebrewing (tasting your final product) can either be a great reward after a lot of hard work and patience or it can be a learning opportunity. The key during those early learning opportunities is to be serious about learning something. If you concentrate while tasting a beer, you really can differentiate between hop bitterness, hop flavor and hop aroma. You can start to differentiate the flavor contributions of your malt versus what flavors are from your yeast. By focusing on these details you start to develop ideas about what you would adjust next time.

The Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) has an official process for training, testing, and certifying beer tasting judges. Obviously no one needs to be trained on what beer they like the taste of, but the BJCP program provides a structure for organizing homebrew competitions and standardizing how beers are to be judged. The 2015 guide has 25 different beer styles, each with sub-styles. They also publish descriptions of 21 official off-flavors. Combined, this offers another avenue of getting feedback on your beer creations- by submitting them to homebrew competitions.

The beer brewed on Snow Day will be ready to crack open just before Christmas. If the recipe lives up to the hype of its author, it should make for some nice holiday drinking. And for the newbies that participated, hopefully the exciting exploration of homebrew added another to the ranks of the 0.4%! **MBG**