

How To Make Mead

A Simple Method Without Expensive Equipment



Ingredients

A 5 Litre bottle of supermarket Spring Water (use at room temperature, not refrigerated).

3 pounds of honey – Of course Guernsey Honey is the best!! If you are a beekeeper, the run off from cappings can be used.

1 balloon big enough to stretch over the mouth of the 5 litre water bottle. (Get some spare balloons in case of breakages)

1 packet of dried Yeast (Allinsons can be bought in the Co-op)

25 raisins

1 Orange

Optional Extras

If you would like to add a bit of spice to this recipe you could add 1 or 2 cloves. But be careful, they are very strong so don't put more than 2.--- or a cinnamon stick, or a pinch of nutmeg.

Pour about half of the water into a clean container then slice up your orange into eighths and put the slices, honey, twenty-five raisins, and the yeast into the water bottle. Pour some water back into the bottle so the level is a couple of inches from the top (no higher) then screw the cap on it and shake it up well. If you can, you should shake it for a good five minutes. This will aerate the mixture and helps the fermentation process.

Now prick a pinhole in the top of the balloon, remove the screw cap from your bottle (do not top the bottle up with water) and put the balloon right over the bottle opening. Stretch the open end of the balloon right over the bottle neck so that as the gases form inside the bottle they will inflate the balloon. Put a rubber band or tape around the neck to keep it firmly in place - if the balloon looks like it might come off, leave it out in full view for the first day so you can monitor it.

(Note: The balloon can age and oxidise over time so you should inspect it regularly to make sure it doesn't break down and develop cracks. If it seems like it is breaking down replace it with a new balloon!)

What Will Happen Next?

Somewhere between an hour and twenty-four hours later the balloon will start to inflate. This is a great sign and it means that your yeast is transforming the contents of the bottle into alcohol. Gas is forming inside the bottle and are escaping through the pinhole. This setup insures the carbon dioxide escapes but no contaminants get into your brew. If the balloon is getting big you may need to poke another hole or two in it. You don't want it to burst! It would leave your mead open to contamination. Once you are satisfied that gas is escaping and the balloon is not under unusual stress, you can set the bottle in a cool dry place like a pantry or garage – If the bottle is in a too warm a place, fermentation can be too vigourous . Check on it every day if you can just to make sure it is ok and the balloon hasn't popped off.

After two to three weeks the major portion of the fermentation will have finished and the balloon will be limp. At this point you can taste a little bit to see how it is coming along but it isn't really a tasty mead at this point; It will need another couple of months to mature – make sure you replace the balloon as the fermentation may not have completely stopped. Over time, as you check on it you will notice that the cloudiness disappears and it slowly clarifies and transforms into mead.

The orange and the raisins can stay in the mixture for the whole duration but if you want to make the mead a little milder and help it clarify faster you can transfer the liquid into another plastic bottle and replace the balloon on that one. This would be after the two to three week ferment period has completed. This process is called racking and it will move your mead along nicely. If you decide to bottle your mead make sure all fermentation has ceased, otherwise you may have burst bottles!

Some Tips

You can make the honey easier to pour by letting it stand in a sink or bowl of warm water. And you can experiment with the flavour a bit by adding a cinnamon stick or a pinch of nutmeg or the cloves to the batch when you add the orange. Don't leave out the raisins. They are not there for taste, they are a necessary feed for the yeast as honey is a bit low in the nutrients that yeast like to give healthy fermentation. If the honey is a bit expensive you can cut this down to two pounds. Any quantity between two and three and a half pounds will work well -- the more honey you put in, the sweeter the mead will be – it is all a matter of taste. However, the more honey you put the longer it will take to mature.

Finally

Be patient and taste your mead every few weeks. It should be really clear and delicious after a few months. It will continue to age and improve over a long period of time so the longer you wait the better it will get. If you are struggling with this, then you should probably make another batch! Try to wait six months if you can before you drink it!

Addendum to this tutorial on mead making: The importance of Sterilising

One of the most important aspects of mead making is sterilisation. It is very important that you sterilise everything when you are making mead.

When mixing up your honey, water and other things you are making a food environment. It is a place loaded with nutrients for yeast and that means it can be easy for other types of unwanted yeast or bacteria to quickly grow! It's almost like a little incubator :) What you want is to make sure no outside yeast or cells develop other than the yeast you add yourself - This means you should wash everything that comes in contact with your new batch of mead including all utensils and any bottles you use to re bottle the mead..

Sterilising will add a little extra work but it is well worth it. It greatly improves your chances of making a wonderful tasting mead.

Using a medium such as Sodium metabisulphite (campden tablets) is a good way to do this. If you cannot obtain this, Milton Sterilising Fluid or tablets can be obtained locally. (Co-op or a chemist, both in the baby department)

If the mead is to be bottled, remember to sterilise the bottles and if using corks, these as well. Whatever you use, please follow the listed instructions, for if the solution is too weak it won't sterilise, and if it is too strong it may slow the fermentation down and may give a bad taste to your mead!