

## Mead 101

A basic mead is well... basic.

The recipe we will be using is just honey, water, yeast, and some form of nutrient for the yeast. There are many other types of mead and of course the recipes gets more complex as you go along. I am including at the end of this write up a list of what the different types of meads are called and what separates them from each other.

The materials needed to create one gallon of a sack mead.

- 1) 3-4 lbs honey (there are many types of honey such as Clover and Orange blossom. We will be using Golden Rod. Each type of honey adds a different taste to the mead.
- 2) 2 gallons of water filtered pure water (one gallon to make the must (proto mead), the rest to top off the carboy).
- 3) 1 packet of yeast (or any type of wine, mead, or Champaign yeast that suits your purpose).
- 4) 1 cup of orange juice at room temp.
- 5) yeast nutrient
- 6) a stainless steel or enameled pot (no not for piddling in)
- 7) wooden or plastic spoon
- 8) carboy
- 9) air lock
- 10) towels (lots of them especially if you work as neatly as I do...not)
- 11) sanitizing solution
- 12) cooling coil (optional. Ice will do if you do not have the coil)
- 13) funnel or plastic tubing for a siphon

The first thing we want to do is prep the yeast. There are two forms of yeast we can use. There is a dry pack such as the type we are using today, and then there is a wet pack. The wet pack is set up similar to a hot cold pack. Inside the packet is another packet. By pressing down and breaking the inner packet you combine the yeast and the nutrient. Let it sit overnight and you have happy yeast. The only size I have found in the wet pack is for a four gallon batch and is generally more expensive than the dry. The yeast we are using today is for a one gallon batch. It is still advisable to add additional nutrient to your must as honey does not contain sugars suitable for fermentation.

For what we are doing today, add the yeast to room temperature orange juice and let it sit for 3-4 hours before starting the mead.

Before we start to make our mead we need to sanitize the carboy, and funnel or plastic tube. I can't stress enough how important it is to sanitize. If you don't sanitize properly then you get bacteria or other nasties in the mead and all you are brewing is sewage. Trust me, it's a bummer to invest the amount of time in making this stuff just to have to toss it.

There are three different schools of thought as to how one makes the must. Each method is good. Each method works.

The first and simplest is to simply add the honey to the water and put it right into the carboy. No boiling needed. This also requires many rackings (moving the must from one carboy to the other) as there will be much sediment forming.

The next is to first boil the water then add the honey. Keep the mixture boiling and remove any scum that rises to the top. It is felt that this method also boils off some of the aromatics and reduces the flavor of the mead.

The last is to boil the water, then reduce the heat just below boiling. Add honey and again remove any scum that floats to the top. This method helps preserve aromatics. None of the three methods has really proven better than the other, so use whatever method you wish.

We will be using the third method. My reasons are that by boiling the water first you kill off any germs that might be present. By reducing the temperature slightly you are not losing as much water and you are reducing the chances of the honey burning to the bottom of your pot.

Ok... so now we are ready to start.

- 1) First we boil the water.
- 2) Let the water boil for a few minutes, then reduce the heat.
- 3) Next we add the honey. Keep stirring until its dissolved. This is important. You don't want the honey sticking and burning to the bottom of the pot.
- 4) Once all of the honey has been added and dissolved, you don't need to stir the must as often. As the honey water combination "cooks", there will be foam rising to the top. The foam made up of the impurities (coagulated proteins and beeswax residue) coming out of the honey. Scoop them out. Keep skimming until there is no more foam floating to the top.
- 5) At this point you need to cool the must to room temperature. I use a cooling coil for my four-gallon batches. Basically it's a copper coil with hoses on each end. One end goes to the faucet and the other end into the drain or against the out side of the pot, by running cold water through the coil the must will cool quickly. You don't have to worry about sanitizing the coil for as soon as the coil hits the hot must anything living on the coil will die.

Since we are making a small batch, an ice bath in the sink will work fine.

6) So the must is now cool. We can either siphon the must into the carboy using a SANITIZED plastic tube or you can pour the must right into the SANITIZED carboy via a SANITIZED funnel.

**IMPORTANT NOTE!!!! MAKE SURE THE MUST IS COOL BEFORE POURING IT INTO THE CARBOY. THIS WILL ELIMINATE THE CHANCE OF A STRESS CRACK FORMING IN THE CARBOY, SHATTERING THE CARBOY, THUS RUINING YOUR MEAD AND YOUR DAY.**

7) Add some of the must to a graduated cylinder and take a hydrometer reading. By comparing the initial reading to the reading you will take at bottling time, you will be able to compute the relative alcohol percentage of your mead. This step of course is not mandatory. In fact I sometimes kinda sorta forget to do it.

8) Ok... the must is in the bottle. Now add the yeast solution, and the nutrient. Swirl it in the carboy to mix it all up. We add the nutrient because the honey does not have the necessary nitrogen required for a vigorous fermentation.

9) Place the SANITIZED airlock in the carboy and fill the reservoir with vodka. You can use water but the alcohol is one more level of a bacterial barrier.

10) At this point we are just waiting. The fermentation process is starting and we just have to let it do its thing. At first the process will be slow then it will pick up quickly. You will note foam forming on the top, and the airlock making all kinds of rude sounds as the carbon dioxide comes a bubbling out. When the bubbles slow way down to almost nothing you are ready to bottle. I typically let the mead sit in the carboy for 4-6 months. You should also rack it to another carboy at least once (I think I have only done that once with all the mead I have made). The reason you rack the mead is to reduce the amount of sediment at the bottom of the carboy and in your bottles. Don't forget to take another hydrometer reading at this point.

11) After 4-6 months of waiting, it is time to bottle. I siphon the mead into SANITIZED beer bottle size bottles (in fact I use beer bottles), and cap them.

12) After another 4-6 months pop a bottle open and taste it. If the mead is not ready then let it sit longer. I have known people to taste their mead and find it not to their liking. They let it sit longer and their nasty mead mutated into something wonderful.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Try different combinations of honey and yeasts. One of the most important things in brewing, and this holds true to beer and cordials as well, is to take extensive notes. I pretty much set my notes up like a scientific notebook. I am sure I go overboard but then I also have detailed information to go back to if I make something I really really like and want to replicate it. If the mead went wrong, I can go back to my notes and make additional notes as to what I felt went wrong so if I try this recipe again, I know what not to do. An example would be the pyment I made. It has a tart aftertaste when served at room temperature. I don't like it but others do. I discovered that if I serve

the piment cold then the aftertaste goes away. I like this piment served cold. Also I feel that if I would have left the grape pulp out or racked the mead during fermentation, then the tartness would not be present at all. These observations are in my notes and when I try that recipe again I will make this adjustment.

There are many sources for recipes for mead. Many of these recipes are slightly different. Its up to you to decide which ones you want to try and what modifications, if any, you wish to make.

The bibliography at the end of this write up has several online resources for mead recipes. Take a peek at them, have fun and enjoy.

The following is the breakdown of the different types of mead.

Sweet  
Medium  
Dry

**Carbonation** - Mead can be:

Still (No carbonation)  
Sparkling (Champagne like)

**Styles** - In alphabetical order:

Bochet - Sack mead that has been burnt or charred  
Bracket - Honeywine and ale combined  
Braggot - Honeywine made with *Malt*  
Capsicumel - Honeywine with chile pepper  
Cyser - Honeywine made with apples or apple juice  
Fortified - Honeywine with alcohol added  
Hippocras - A spiced piment Honeywine made with any herbs and grapes  
Hydromel - Watered down or made weaker - French origin  
Melomel or Mulsum - Honeywine made with any vegetable or fruit excluding apples or grapes  
Metheglin - Honeywine made with any herbs or spices  
Morat - Honeywine with mulberries  
Omphacamel - Honeywine with verjuice (juice from unripe grapes)  
Oxymel - Honeywine wine vinegar combined  
Piment - Honeywine made with grapes  
Traditional - No adjunct ingredients  
Rhodomel - Honeywine and attar (distilled rose petals)  
Sack - Very sweet honeywine  
Varietal - No adjunct ingredients made with a varietal honey

References:

Vargas & Gulling: "Making Wild Wines and Meads" Storey Publishing. 1999.

Berry: "First Steps in Wine Making " G.W. Kent inc. 2000.

<http://www.honeywine.com/mead/styles/styles.html>

[http://www.meadmadecomplicated.org/mead\\_making/recipes/styles.html](http://www.meadmadecomplicated.org/mead_making/recipes/styles.html)

<http://www.bjcp.org/styles04/mead.html>

<http://www.greydragon.org/brewing/mead.html> some recipes and has 13/14 century recipe w/redaction

[http://www.brewsupplies.com/mead\\_recipes.htm](http://www.brewsupplies.com/mead_recipes.htm) more recipes

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