

# Holiday Beers

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## History:

The term “Winter Warmer” comes from the British brewing tradition. Some brewers would produce a winter beer that was stronger than their regular beer, with fuller flavor to match the strength, and because English ales are served at cellar temperature (not ice-cold) they actually did serve to warm up the chilled consumer. Winter warmers became a part of the holiday table as well: roasted & fried foods, hearty soups, and a festive table setting are all a fine match for a traditional winter warmer.

When Samuel Smith's Winter Welcome Ale first came to the United States, fifteen years ago, it was the first taste of a classic "winter warmer" for many Americans. The strength and flavor is wonderfully balanced by the elegant Samuel Smith signature, a result of slate Yorkshire Square fermenters and 250 years of brewing experience. Even the label and bottle are part of the tradition. The Victorian design elements pay tribute to the history of winter warmers, and the holiday scene in the center (which changes every year) reminds one of different holiday traditions.

The current American winter beer landscape is evolving. Winter seasonal offerings come from almost every brewing nation, and of course American brewers love to make products that push or redefine styles: an American winter warmer can be a strong ale, possibly hopped to high levels; it may be a stout; the brew may have spices or fruit; it might be a strong rich lager in the style of a doppelbock. There are really no hard and fast rules about winter beers in America, although they do usually tend to be strong, with other flavors boosted to match.

In some commodities, “winter seasonal” can be a marketing term designed to lean on the shopping pandemonium of the season. (Think of candies or candles) Folks who appreciate fine beer are fortunate: just when we are ready, there are excellent options that really do compliment the season. Strength, complexity, flavor . . . winter warmers pack more into each drop. Let them warm up just a bit after taking them from the fridge. Sip them a bit more slowly. Serve them with Yorkshire pudding, or a roasted turkey. Remember to sink a little deeper into your chair, and ponder the warm fire. Meanwhile, contemplate the fine winter warmer in your glass.

## Characteristics of Winter Beers –

- Generally a big beer
- Stronger alcohol
- Hopped to higher level
- Pronounced complex flavor
- Darker in color

- Spice or fruit additions
- Medium to full body

## Spiced Beer

### History:

Before widespread use of hops, other plants and herbs were used to preserve and bitter beer. These included: spruce, ginger, ground ivy, sweet mary, tansy, sage wormwood and sweet gale. To this day, many styles of beer still use spices to obtain the desired flavor.

### Style:

See attached copy of BJCP Style Guidelines

### Available Spices for use in beer:

Cinnamon	Juniper Berries	Lime Leaves
Coriander Seeds	Anise	Root Beer Extract
Ginger	Spruce	Szechuan Peppercorn
Cardamon	Pepper	Ginseng
Cloves	Sweet Basil	Star Anise
Allspice	Horehound	Cubub Berries
Nutmeg	Horseradish	Orange Peel
Licorice	Walnut Leaves	Mint

Note: Whenever possible, use fresh or freshly ground dried spices. Only use pre-ground ingredients as a last resort.

### Procedures:

- 1) Add spices directly to boil kettle for last 10 to 12 minutes (or let steep for 10 minutes with no heat applied at end of boil).
- 2) Boil spices separately in a small amount of water to make a spiced “tea”, cool, and add “tea” directly into secondary fermentation vessel. (Be careful not to introduce oxygen when using this process).
- 3) Make spice “tea” as in Step 2 above and add directly to bottling bucket or keg.

When using spices be very careful with amounts used as a little goes a long way. Certain spices are quite strong (e.g. clove, pepper) and too much will ruin a good beer.

Consider reducing the amount of bittering hops used as the spices will add bitterness to the beer. This is more dependent on how long the spices are in the boil. Much the same way dry hopping adds hop aroma, dry spicing (adding spice “tea” during or after fermentation) will increase the spice aroma.

## **21B. Christmas/Winter Specialty Spiced Beer**

**Aroma:** A wide range of aromatics is possible, although many examples are reminiscent of Christmas cookies, gingerbread, English-type Christmas pudding, spruce trees, or mulling spices. Any combination of aromatics that suggests the holiday season is welcome. The base beer style often has a malty profile that supports the balanced presentation of the aromatics from spices and possibly other special ingredients. Additional fermentables (e.g., honey, molasses, maple syrup, etc.) may lend their own unique aromatics. Hop aromatics are often absent, subdued, or slightly spicy. Some fruit character (often of dried citrus peel, or dried fruit such as raisins or plums) is optional but acceptable. Alcohol aromatics may be found in some examples, but this character should be restrained. The overall aroma should be balanced and harmonious, and is often fairly complex and inviting.

**Appearance:** Generally medium amber to very dark brown (darker versions are more common). Usually clear, although darker versions may be virtually opaque. Some chill haze is acceptable. Generally has a well-formed head that is often off-white to tan.

**Flavor:** Many interpretations are possible; allow for brewer creativity as long as the resulting product is balanced and provides some spice presentation. Spices associated with the holiday season are typical (as mentioned in the Aroma section). The spices and optional fermentables should be supportive and blend well with the base beer style. Rich, malty and/or sweet malt-based flavors are common, and may include caramel, toast, nutty, or chocolate flavors. May include some dried fruit or dried fruit peel flavors such as raisin, plum, fig, orange peel or lemon peel. May include distinctive flavors from specific fermentables (molasses, honey, brown sugar, etc.), although these elements are not required. A light spruce or other evergreen tree character is optional but found in some examples. The wide range of special ingredients should be supportive and balanced, not so prominent as to overshadow the base beer. Bitterness and hop flavor are generally restrained so as to not interfere with the spices and special ingredients. Generally finishes rather full and satisfying, and often has some alcohol flavor. Roasted malt characteristics are rare, and not usually stronger than chocolate.

**Mouthfeel:** A wide range of interpretations is possible. Body is generally medium to full, and a certain malty chewiness is often present. Moderately low to moderately high carbonation is typical. Many examples will show some well-aged, warming alcohol content, but without being overly hot. The beers do not have to be overly strong to show some warming effects.

**Overall Impression:** A stronger, darker, spiced beer that often has a rich body and warming finish suggesting a good accompaniment for the cold winter season.

**History:** Throughout history, beer of a somewhat higher alcohol content and richness has been enjoyed during the winter holidays, when old friends get together to enjoy the season. Many breweries produce unique seasonal offerings that may be darker, stronger, spiced, or otherwise more characterful than their normal beers. Spiced versions are an American or Belgian tradition, since English or German breweries traditionally do not use spices in their beer.

**Comments:** Overall balance is the key to presenting a well-made Christmas beer. The special ingredients should complement the base beer and not overwhelm it. The brewer should recognize that some combinations of base beer styles and special ingredients work well together while others do not make for harmonious combinations. THE ENTRANT MAY DECLARE AN UNDERLYING BEER STYLE AS WELL AS THE SPECIAL INGREDIENTS USED. THE

BASE STYLE, SPICES OR OTHER INGREDIENTS NEED NOT BE IDENTIFIED. THE BEER MUST INCLUDE SPICES AND MAY INCLUDE OTHER FERMENTABLES (SUGARS, HONEY, MAPLE SYRUP, MOLASSES, TREACLE, ETC.) OR FRUIT. If the base beer is a classic style, the original style should come through in aroma and flavor. Whenever spices, herbs or additional fermentables are declared, each should be noticeable and distinctive in its own way (although not necessarily individually identifiable; balanced with the other ingredients is still critical). English-style Winter Warmers (some of which may be labeled Christmas Ales) are generally not spiced, and should be entered as Old Ales. Clones of specific Belgian-style Christmas ales should be entered as Belgian Specialty Beers.

Ingredients: Generally ales, although some dark strong lagers exist. Spices are required, and often include those evocative of the Christmas season (e.g., allspice, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, ginger) but any combination is possible and creativity is encouraged. Fruit peel (e.g., oranges, lemon) may be used, as may subtle additions of other fruits. May use a wide range of crystal-type malts, particularly those that add dark fruit or caramel flavors. Flavorful adjuncts are often used (e.g., molasses, treacle, invert sugar, brown sugar, honey, maple syrup, etc.).

Vital Statistics:

OG	FG	IBUs	SRM	ABV
-	-	-	-	-

OG, FG, IBUs, SRM and ABV will vary depending on the underlying base beer. ABV is generally above 6%, and most examples are somewhat dark in color.

Commercial Examples: Anchor Our Special Ale, Harpoon Winter Warmer, Weyerbacher Winter Ale, Goose Island Christmas Ale, North Coast Wintertime Ale, Great Lakes Christmas Ale, Samuel Adams Winter Lager

### **Holiday Beers for Tasting:**

- 1) Buffalo Bill's Pumpkin Ale – ale with pumpkin and spices added (cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg).
- 2) Samuel Adams Winter Lager – dark wheat lager brewed with winter spices. Weizenbock, brewed with two-row, Caramel 60, wheat malts, Munich malt, East Kent Goldings, Tettnang-Hallertauer, Tettnang-Tettnanger Noble hops, and Curacao orange peel, cinnamon and ginger spices. 5.8% alcohol by volume (Original Gravity: 1.060, decoction mash)
- 3) Lost Coast Winterbraun - American pale malt and caramel and chocolate malts. Saaz hops give a spicy flavor and aroma. 6.5% alcohol by volume
- 4) Sierra Nevada Celebration Ale – 2 row pale, English caramel and dextrin, bittering hops - Chinook, finishing hops - Cascade and Centennial, dry hopping - Cascade, Centennial and Chinook. 6.8% alcohol by volume (Original Gravity: 1.064, Bitterness: 62 IBU)
- 5) Alaskan Winter Ale – seasonal ale brewed (English Old Ale) with Sitka spruce tips. Six malts including Pale, Wheat, Munich and caramelized. Saaz hops. 6.4% alcohol by volume (Original Gravity: 1.066, Bitterness: 27 IBU, Color: 17 SRM)
- 6) Anchor Brewing Our Special Ale – ale brewed with spices with natural flavors added. Every year since 1975 the brewers at Anchor have brewed a unique Christmas Ale. This is the 31<sup>st</sup> year Anchor has brewed this beer. The recipe is different every year as is the tree on the label

### **Style Characteristics**

- The base beer style often has a malty profile that supports the balanced presentation of spices or other ingredients.
- Additional fermentables may include honey, molasses, maple syrup, or brown sugar.
- Aroma is generally balanced but often complex and inviting.
- Appearance is often medium amber to very dark brown.
- Flavor is open to many creative interpretations as long as the resulting product is balanced. Spices associated with the holiday season are typical. The spices and additional fermentables should be supportive and blend well with the base beer style.
- Bitterness and hop flavor are generally restrained so as to not interfere with the spices and special ingredients
- Body is generally medium to full, and a certain malty chewiness is often present. Moderately low to moderately high carbonation is typical. Many examples will show some well-aged, warming alcohol content, without being overly hot.
- Overall these are often stronger, darker, spiced beers with a rich body and warming finish – just the right choice for the cold winter season.

### **Brewing Considerations:**

- 1) This is generally a big beer
  - Make a yeast starter or repitch onto a yeast cake
  - Oxygenate the wort
  - Watch fermentation temperature
- 2) Spice additions
  - Use fresh or freshly ground dried spices. Only use pre-ground ingredients as a last resort.
  - Add spices directly to boil kettle for last 10 to 12 minutes (or let steep for 10 minutes with no heat applied at end of boil).
  - Boil spices separately in a small amount of water to make a spiced “tea”, cool, and add “tea” directly into secondary fermentation vessel. (Be careful not to introduce oxygen when using this process).
  - Make spice “tea” as in Step 2 above and add directly to bottling bucket or keg.
  - When using spices be very careful with amounts used as a little goes a long way
  - Consider reducing the amount of bittering hops used as the spices will add bitterness to the beer. This is more dependent on how long the spices are in the boil. Much the same way dry hopping adds hop aroma, dry spicing (adding spice “tea” during or after fermentation) will increase the spice aroma.

