

Strong Ales Category 19

A. Old Ales

B. English Barleywine

C. American Barleywine

Style guidelines can be found at www.BJCP.org.

Recipe formulation

When brewing strong ales (1.080 or above) it is a good idea to bring your brew system's efficiency down and account for this by padding recipes with extra base malt or with adjuncts like brown sugar, molasses, Lyle's Golden Syrup, or Treacle (Dark Syrup). Also if an all grain system is too small for the higher gravities then these sugars and malt extracts help with achieving target original gravities.

Old Ales are differentiated in this category by almost always having adjuncts such as the sugars mentioned above as well as starchy adjuncts like maize, flaked barley, wheat and malt extracts. A healthy dose of crystal/caramel malts along with other specialty malts are strongly urged. Dark old ales may have darker malts like chocolate or dark malt but are used very sparingly to avoid overly roasted characters. Hop variety isn't as important with this style as it is low hopped and aged versions lack any hop presence. English varieties are typically used.

Barleywines are primarily well-modified pale malt with a good amount of crystal/caramel malts with restraint on dark malts since most color beyond the crystal addition is achieved by long vigorous boils. English styles call for hops such as Northdown, Target, East Kent Goldings and Fuggles while Americans tend to use citrusy American hops in larger quantities. English versions tend to place less emphasis on the hop character than the American versions but a hop presence is still expected. English versions tend to be darker, maltier and fruitier.

Brewing Techniques

Mash temps should be adjusted to the low end of the range (148-152) to keep these ales from being too cloying and to avoid too many unfermentable sugars as there will be a lot of these contributed by the addition of crystals, and other specialty malts. The mash temperature should be adjusted based on the target gravity with a higher gravity having a lower mash temp and lower gravity having a slightly higher mash temp.

When running into the kettle or during your boil you can remove a half gallon or more of the wort to be reduced in another pot to create even more caramel and malt complexity. Boils should be 75 minutes or longer help add color to your wort.

Avoid scorching your sugars by removing your boiling wort from the flame while adding these adjuncts.

American Barleywines can be dry hopped in secondary to further enhance hop presence.

Yeast

Selecting yeast is up to the brewer with these styles based upon aspects that will be created. Key points to remember with strong ales is that you chose a good healthy attenuating yeast that will finish at a lower final gravity. Pitching rates should also be kept in mind. For a 5 gallon batch possibly use two pitchables or a starter. If the pitching rate is too low then a possibility of higher ester production that could distract from the malt or hop character that is being sought after.

Old ales usually use a British ale yeast with low attenuation, but can handle higher alcohol levels. English Barleywines a characterful English yeast. American styles go mostly with an attenuative American yeast.

Fermentation temperatures are important with these styles since there are so many sugars. Internal heat created by fermentation can raise temperatures. Keeping ester production low with the help of a water bath (keg tubs, etc.) and ice packs or temperature controlled fridges allow cleaner fermentations without masking malt and hops notes that are key to these styles. 72 degrees and under are suggested.

Entering Competitions

With these three styles there are some differences and similarities that can help decide which category to enter into. With all these styles aged varieties can do very well. But with aging comes changes in complexities, reduction in hop character and usually a more prominent malt profile. If your American Barleywine now lacks the hops perhaps it will do better as an English Barleywine, A young hoppier old ale may do better as a Barleywine or an older aged English Barleywine could pass for an old ale.

Have fun brewing and remember to experiment and have fun.