



Beer Tasting

Why bother?

There are many different ways to enjoy beer. It's fun to share a pitcher of beer with friends; it's great to have a beer with meals. A crisp *Pilsner* can be refreshing after a long day, while a rich *Barley Wine* can bring warmth to a cold one.

Taking the time to really taste the beer in front of you, however, can open the door to a whole different level of enjoyment. It is true that beers are usually crafted for drinkability, yet they often have complexity of flavour that is available to the drinker who is willing to stop and savour.

So why bother? Because life is for living, and the more you enjoy every moment, the more you enrich your life. Just like every other food you taste, if you pay more attention to the beers you drink, you will begin to understand which flavours you like and what styles you prefer. As you continue to explore, you will really start to appreciate the complexity of flavour that can be found...

Relax & enjoy!

Formal beer tasting sessions, with a guide or a group of friends, are informative and fun. However, beer appreciation can also be a simple pastime. It can be as easy as taking the time to notice the flavours in every beer you drink. Here are a few general rules to keep in mind:

- 1. Make sure your beer isn't too cold.**
If a beer is very cold, it is a lot harder to taste. It's a good idea to pull your beer out of the fridge 15 minutes early (or you can always take your time drinking it!)
- 2. Always pour the beer into a glass.**
This releases the aromas, as well as the CO², and will make it a lot easier to taste the full flavour of the beer.
- 3. Relax and Enjoy:**
Taking a moment to smell your beer and linger on your first sip will make every beer a rewarding experience.



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Taste and Savour

This section outlines basic beer-tasting technique, and what to look for. The [Beerology tasting sheet](#) provides some helpful guidelines and terminology, and can be downloaded to have beer-tasting sessions at home, at the pub, or to record personal impressions.

Appearance

Raise your glass, and take a moment to appreciate the appearance of the beer in front of you. Although colour and clarity aren't necessarily an indication of the beer's quality, the look of any given beer was crafted intentionally and is an integral part of the drinking experience. The colour chart on the [Beerology tasting sheet](#) provides common beer colour descriptors. The clarity of a beer can vary from *brilliant* to *cloudy*. Head can tell you a bit more about the beer. Beers that aren't extreme in their alcohol content should have good head retention (the foam doesn't collapse immediately). Head retention often indicates a well-crafted beer, made with quality ingredients. As you drink your beer, look for lace-like pattern (left by the foam) on the sides of your glass. This is known as *Belgian lace* and is another indication of good quality.

Aroma

Smelling your beer is one of the most important steps in beer tasting. Our sense of smell informs the way we taste things, opening up a complexity of flavours to the palate. If the beer has no discernable aroma, agitate it by swirling it around in your glass. This will release some carbonation, which will carry the aroma up to your nose. It is always easiest to start with a general impression: how intense is the aroma? Is it sweet (malt aroma), sharp (hop aroma), or a balance of different notes? If you like, you can then take the time to identify more specific aromas in the beer. The [Beerology tasting sheet](#) provides some common aroma descriptors. Of course, it is always important to note whether you like the aroma of the beer or not!

Flavour

The flavour of a beer should be a natural continuation of the aroma. There are a few added dimensions that will appear, most notably bitterness. Swirl the beer around in your mouth before swallowing it. Take a note of any flavours you taste, compare these flavours to other flavours you know. Does this beer remind you of anything? If you like, take a look at the [Beerology tasting sheet](#) and see if the beer contains any of the common beer characters listed. Again, it is helpful to note the intensity of the flavour, the balance between sweetness and bitterness, and your general impressions.



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Mouthfeel

Another component of flavour is *mouthfeel*. Mouthfeel refers to the texture and weight of the beer, as opposed to the actual taste. High alcohol beer can have a *warming* quality, not unlike hard alcohol, while bitter beers can sometimes be *astringent*. The weight, or *body*, of beer can also vary from being light and watery, to being full and heavy. Another interesting thing to notice is the carbonation level, since it varies between different beers. Ask yourself: is this carbonation level pleasant or distracting?

Finish

The final component of flavour is *finish*. Take a moment to pause between sips. Does the flavour of the beer linger, or is the finish short? The after-taste can be sweet or bitter, and can take on many flavours, either in succession or all at once. Also notice the intensity of the finish. The finish of a beer depends greatly on the style in which it is brewed. The most important thing to note is: do you want to take another sip?

General Impression

Having taken a few moments to appreciate the various aspects of the beer in front of you, it is always a good idea to summarize your impressions of the beer. Were the flavours really lively and well balanced, or did they fall flat? Did the beer have a very fresh quality to it, or do you suspect that it was stale? Finally, take a moment to decide how much you liked the beer. Just because it was very flavourful and fresh, doesn't mean that it was to your taste! Feel free to take more notes and share your impressions with friends.