

Host your own Tasting

How can you bring some excitement to the same drink that you've loved all your life and still come across to your friends, family and neighbours as the resident beer expert?

Why not host your own Beer Tasting? This is not as tough as you may think and you should be able to have blast along the way.

- First thing to admit is that beer is not beer. Not in the way most people see it. Yes, beer is golden, cold, refreshing and tastes great in the summer, but it is much more than that. There are at least 65 different beer styles around the world and thousands of variations of each style.
- Next, pick a date and invite a bunch of friends. Try to stay around 12 people. It gets too busy with more.

Picking the Right Beers

- There is no such thing as the right beers in this case. This is a journey that you've embarked on and it's the experience and fun that you'll have along the way that counts.
- **Themes** – you could pick beers from certain regions (Germany, Belgium, England, The World, Canada, Ontario) or you could simply try a selection of different styles
- **How many?** – I like to work with 8 – 10 different beers. Anything more than that will saturate your taste buds and you won't pick up the details on the last few. Besides, this allows you to do a bunch of these throughout the year.
- **How do I pick?** – try your local retailer and check out their styles and brands. With over 300 different brands, it will take you quite a while to exhaust that avenue.
- **Selection** – try to include different styles of beer, not just the ones you are familiar with. This is really about learning the differences between beers – not trying to get you to switch from your favourite brand. In fact, you should include your favourite in the first tasting. You'll find out soon, that when you go through this, you may find new aromas and flavours in a beer where you least expect it. Make sure that you include lighter tasting beers and gradually range up to full bodied brands.
- You should be able to get 3-4 samples out of one bottle which means you shouldn't need any more than 3-4 bottles of each brand.

I've got the beer, now what?

- Pick up some tasting cups (little plastic wine cups are the best) that hold about 2-3 ounces of beer
- It's always a great idea to have some food to go with it. You could just have some unsalted crackers (these help to cleanse your palate between beers) or you could opt for a variety of cheeses. Beer & Cheese? Absolutely! In fact, many experts agree that beer and cheese is an easier match than wine and cheese. Remember, I said easier, not better. If you opt for cheese, buy a selection from mild to sharp including some Blues or Stiltons. Use the cheese to see which beer is the best match with which cheese? This is great all on its own!
- Visit a local brewery, brewpub or brew your own. Tell them what you doing and ask them for a small sample of malted barley and hops. If you can, try to get at least three different kinds of malt (pale, caramel and chocolate). These ingredients will help you to understand the flavours and aromas present in beer.



Location, Location, Location

- Try to pick a location that has the following;
 - Good lighting
 - Not too much noise or other distractions

Follow the Leader

- Since you're acting as host and guide, you'll need to help your guests understand how to properly taste beer. After all, this is not about drinking...it's about sampling.
- Pour the beer into the tasting glass – straight in and try to get some foam (this is what will provide the great aromas you're looking for)
- When tasting beer, learn to follow these simple guidelines.
 - Look (check out the colour, clarity and foam)
 - Smell (look for aromas to help to set up your tasting experience)
 - Taste (roll it around in your mouth and swallow)
 - Taste again (the second time will show you some flavours and aromas that you may have missed the first time)
- Most brands, especially on The Beer Store website have tasting notes listed. You can use these to help with the tasting but it shouldn't be the only thing you look for. A good example is Budweiser which is very smooth, refreshing and thirst quenching. Most people would say it has no taste or aroma but I would disagree. When you sample Bud properly (with lots of foam), you'll notice a very nice aroma of banana or even Juicy Fruit.
- It takes time to develop your palate. At this point, make sure you are having a conversation around what other people are experiencing. One thing we all have to remember is that we are individuals and what we smell and taste is based on our personal experiences.
- Taste one beer at a time and don't hurry. All good things take time. A nice touch is to leave at least one sample of each on the table so that you can see the rich range of colours.
- Never judge a book by its cover! Some dark beers are neither full bodied or filling. Some lighter golden coloured beers have intense flavours and complex aromas
- Not a bad idea to keep notes – you can compare them at later tastings.

I think you'll be surprised at the reaction you get for pulling this off. Beer is after all, the social drink of the ages. It encourages conversation and enjoyment and you might actually find out something you didn't know before.

As a great host, please ensure that your guests are always consuming responsibly.

Beware of what you are about to start. I introduced a friend to a variety of beers several years ago and now, he makes me take him beer shopping. On our last visit to The Beer Store, we left with 25 different brands.

I hope you have a great time exploring your Thirst For Knowledge.

Cheers

Side Beers



1. Always pour your beer into a glass. Bottles have narrow openings and do not allow much carbonation or aroma to be released – meaning it finds a great home in your stomach – leading to a feeling of fullness
2. Always pour with an inch or two of foam head. Aside from a great appearance, foam allows all of the wonderful aromas to leave the beer and go to you. It protects beer from oxygen (big enemy) and keeps some of the carbonation in (fresher, longer) and lets some out (not so much bloating)
3. Temperature has a huge effect on beer – the colder the temperature, the less flavour beer has. Lagers are best consumed colder (2-7C) while ales are naturally more flavourful once they get warmer (7-13C). Big thing to remember here is this is really all personal preference.
4. Generally speaking, ales are like red wines and lagers are like white wines. This means lagers, which are typically less aromatic and flavourful should be matched with lighter tasting foods and ales, which are generally more robust and complex should be matched with fuller tasting foods.
5. Your choice of glasses will dramatically influence your overall beer experience – tall, narrow glasses for lagers and lighter Canadian ales and larger, open mouthed glasses for ales is a good way to start. More to come in future articles....

