

Chapter 1

Welcome to the Wonderful World of Wort

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One vexing question for the homebrewer wannabe is “why go through the trouble of brewing beer at home when I can just buy it at the local store?”

Well, for starters, brewing beer at home is no trouble if you enjoy what you’re doing, and with the help of this book, you can certainly enjoy homebrewing. Secondly, homebrewed beer can be every bit as good as — if not better than — a lot of commercial beer, with more flavor and character than most. In fact, avoiding mass-market beer was the original inspiration for homebrewing. Thirdly, homebrewing is a hobby that pays many dividends, from having your own house brand of beer to hanging colorful award ribbons on your wall to earning the undying admiration of your beer-drinking buddies. (**Warning:** Admiration can be addictive.)

In this chapter, I give you an overview of the topics covered in detail in the rest of the book as well as a bit of the history of homebrewing and its recent surge in popularity.

Homebrewers Abound!

Becoming a homebrewer means you’re in good company. According to the American Homebrewers Association (AHA) in Boulder, Colorado, an estimated 1 million homebrewers are brewing in the United States. That’s a lot of brewers. And the hobby continues to expand every year. Recent estimates indicate that over 1,000 homebrew supply retailers and several hundred homebrewing clubs have popped up in response to homebrewing’s growing popularity. Most of these clubs are small, but the national group (AHA) boasts 15,000 members. Homebrewing associations are growing worldwide, too.

The explosive growth in homebrewing has been closely mirrored by a tremendous increase in small, craft breweries in the U.S. — this is no coincidence. Since homebrewing became legal almost 30 years ago, the interest in hand-crafted beer has blossomed, and over 1,500 brewpubs and microbreweries have opened in this same period of time. The growth in the American craft-brewing industry has been so dynamic that even European countries with long and respected brewing histories have had no choice but to sit up and take notice. Small, craft breweries have begun opening up in Canada, England, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe.

In the more than 20 years that I've been involved in homebrewing, I've had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with hundreds of people who share a common interest in beer and homebrewing. Here are some of the reasons so many folks seem to enjoy brewing their own beer:

- ✓ To participate in the do-it-yourself homebrewing trend — what other hobby allows you to drink the fruits of your labor?
- ✓ To make beers comparable to hard-to-find microbrews and expensive brews from around the world.
- ✓ To share homebrewed beer with friends and family members (beware of mooches).

All the Right Stuff

New homebrewers are no different from other hobbyists; they're champing at the bit (or foaming at the mouth) to get started with their hobby. Although this unbridled enthusiasm is good, jumping headlong into the unknown isn't. You need to incorporate some degree of planning into your decision to homebrew. What kind of equipment do I need, and where can I find it? How much time do I need to dedicate to this whole process? What kind of ingredients do I need, and where can I buy them? What other preparations do I need to make? What do I do with the beer when I finish brewing? Can I take a homebrewer's deduction on the IRS 1040 long form? These are the questions you need to ask (and answer!) before you make the plunge. Conveniently, all the answers you need are right here in this book. (And no, the IRS doesn't give a homebrewer's tax deduction. Sorry.)

Gathering the equipment you need

Like having the right tools to do work around your house, having the right equipment for brewing your beer is essential.



Although the equipment needed at the beginner level is relatively inexpensive, you may want to try your hand at brewing beer without the cost commitment of buying the equipment first. If you're fortunate enough to live near one, try brewing a batch of beer at a *Brew On Premises* (BOP), using the BOP's equipment and facilities. (BOPs are breweries at which individuals can brew their own batch of beer.) If you happen to know of other homebrewers in your area, ask to participate in one of their brews so you can get a feel for the hobby, or search out local homebrew clubs for assistance.

If you're ready to commit to buying your own equipment, check out Chapter 2 for all the details on the equipment required to get started and pursue each level of brewing thereafter.

Tracing the homebrewing timeline

Homebrewing wannabes are understandably concerned with how much of a time commitment is necessary to brew beer at home. To someone not familiar with the fermentation processes, this takes a little extra explaining. First, you have the hands-on part of brewing: the actual cooking of the *wort* (unfermented beer; rhymes with *dirt*) on the stovetop, the *fermentation* (conversion of sugars to alcohol and CO₂ by yeast) and *aging* (maturation) processes, and then the bottling of the beer. What most people aren't aware of is the hands-off part of brewing — the stage when the brewer does nothing but wait patiently. This part not only constitutes the longest segment of the timeline, but it also represents a test of the brewer's patience and self-restraint.

At the beginner level, you need at least two or three hours on brewing day to properly sanitize the equipment, brew and cool the wort, *pitch* the yeast (add it to your wort), seal the fermenter, and clean up whatever mess you made. (Part III details the brewing day process.) You need to set aside the same amount of time on the day you bottle the beer. (Chapter 13 provides all you need to know about bottling.)

In between the brewing and bottling days, however, you face the little matter of fermentation. The yeast needs at least seven days to complete the fermentation cycle — sometimes more, depending on extenuating circumstances. You need do nothing more than wait patiently for the yeast to complete its task. Even after you've bottled your beer, you still need to wait patiently while your brew conditions in the bottles — two weeks is the recommended minimum length of this conditioning process.

At the beginner level, if you brew on a Saturday your brewing timeline may look something like the following:

1. Brew day (S). **Ferment the beer Su-M-T-W-Th-F.**
2. Bottle day (S). **Condition the beer Su-M-T-W-Th-F-S-Su-M-T-W-Th-F.**
3. **Drink the beer!**

As you begin to employ different ingredients, equipment, and processes in your beer-making repertoire, expect the timeline to expand. Secondary fermentation (a helpful extra aging step — see Chapter 11) adds another two weeks to the timeline, and advanced brewers, for example, may spend as many as eight to ten hours in a single day brewing their beer from grain (see Chapter 12).

Please note that homebrewing is a pursuit that requires a higher degree of dedication than, say, su doku puzzles, but the rewards are considerable (and tasty!) In addition to personal gratification, quality homebrew can inspire a certain respect from your fellow brewers, awe in nonbrewers, and other intangibles that make all the effort worthwhile.

Adding ingredients galore!

Like various kinds of bread, all beer styles consist of the same basic ingredients. The difference is that the ingredients vary slightly in attributes and quantities required from one beer style to the next. Although wheat bread may look and taste different than rye bread, they're very much alike and made in very much the same way.

At the commercial level, brewing uses grain (mostly malted barley), hops, yeast, and water (see Chapters 4 through 7). Thanks to many stores and Internet sites that specialize in homebrewing supplies, homebrewers today have access to most of the same ingredients used by corporate brewhouses everywhere. Of course, these shops don't just provide the everyday ingredients for the average beer; different hop varieties and yeast strains from around the world are now available in the homebrewing market.

With the help of specially made products, such as malt syrup derived from grain (see Chapter 4), beginner homebrewers can easily produce beers that emulate those made commercially. Intermediate- and advanced-level homebrewers may even make their beer with the same grains used by their favorite commercial brewers.

Beyond the four basic building blocks of beer, dozens of other flavorings and additives can contribute different flavors and textures to your brew (see Chapter 8), and a number of other agents can affect the appearance of your brew (see Chapter 9).



Although thriftiness is a virtue, you need high-quality ingredients to produce high-quality beer — so loosen your grip on the purse strings when buying homebrew ingredients.

Not all of these ingredients are necessary to make great beer, but they exist for you, the brewer, to use if you're so inclined. In your house, you're the Head Brewer — you make the choices (but read about 'em in Parts II and III first).



Like home cooking, homebrewing doesn't come with an automatic guarantee of quality. Certain responsibilities and expectations are squarely on the brewer to ensure that each batch of beer turns out right. Failure to heed simple rules and suggestions can result in a less-than-perfect brew and a waste of time, effort, and money.

Preparing wisely

Good homebrew starts with good preparation, and good preparation starts with a complete list of ingredients. Nothing is more aggravating than starting your brewing procedures only to find that you're missing a necessary ingredient. Before you head off to your homebrew supply shop or submit a mail-order form, consider all your needs. Occasionally, homebrewers fail to look beyond the beer recipe and forget something as simple — but essential — as bottle caps.

Another important preparation consideration is having the brewery in order — clearing your workspace of clutter and having all your equipment present and accounted for (see Chapter 2). Removing free-roaming pets to another part of the house is always a good idea.

Sanitizing your equipment is also high on the preparation checklist (see Chapter 3); you never want your brew to come in contact with equipment that isn't properly clean and sanitized to protect against beer-ruining bacteria.

All done — now what?

So, say your beer is done and ready to drink — what next? Well, grab a bottle opener, a clean beer glass, and a seat, because it's time to revel in your success. While you're admiring the brew in your glass and savoring its flavor on your palate, consider how you can best commemorate your efforts:

- ✓ Invite a bunch of your closest (and thirstiest) buddies over to sample it.
- ✓ Give it away as gifts to close friends and family members deserving of your time and talent.
- ✓ Increase your good standing with bosses and other influential people by presenting them with a bottle of beer of your own making.
- ✓ Swap a couple of bottles with other homebrewers in your area.
- ✓ Submit some entries to homebrew competitions around the country.
(See Chapter 25 to find out more about homebrew competitions.)



One of the most incredible awards is having your homebrew replicated and sold by a nationally distributed brand — kinda like your mom's chocolate chip cookies being made by Sara Lee. Several well-known microbrewers solicit homebrew entries to their own annual, sponsored competitions. The winners may receive a cash award and royalties or have their beer recipe reproduced as a one-time-only specialty beer and sold to the public. For example, every year the Boston Beer Company hosts the Samuel Adams LongShot competition. Two winners get their beer brewed, packaged, and nationally distributed for a limited time in the LongShot Variety Pack. Check out <http://www.samueladams.com/promotions/LongShot/Default.aspx> for more information on entering this contest.

Or you can do as I do when I'm particularly pleased with a batch of brew — hoard it, hide it, jealously guard it, and only take a bottle out to celebrate the most sublime accomplishments in life — like making another batch of great beer!