



The Home Brewery

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GROWING YOUR OWN HOPS

The hop plant is a perennial plant that produces little cones or flowers called hops, which are one of the main ingredients in brewing beer. Fresh hops can add an intense hop flavor and aroma to your brews. Ever thought of growing your own hops? It's fun and easy to do - here is some information to help you have success.

Getting Started

Hop rhizomes are small roots that are cut from the main root system of a mature female hop plant, it is wise to plant two rhizomes of the same variety together. Plan to plant in the spring after the frost is gone, but no later than May. After the rhizomes are planted, the bines (hop vines) of a new hop plant will begin to grow. Hop vines grow vertically winding around their support system, such as a fence or pole. In order for flowering to occur, the weather must be frost free for about 120 days, the plant must have ample moisture, and there must be plenty of long length sunlight. Keep in mind that in The United States hops grow the best in the pacific northwest. So consider your growing conditions when choosing a variety of hop as some are more tolerant of extreme conditions. Remember, upon receiving your hop rhizomes, keep them moist in a plastic bag with holes punched in it and store them in the refrigerator until the ground is thawed enough to plant. Do not freeze them. If the ground is still too cold in May, you can plant them in a gallon pot and transplant them outside in June.

Mid-Season

In June, as the plant reaches its maximum height, which could be anywhere from 15-25 feet, it will begin to grow sidearms. The sidearms will then bear the hop cones. As the hop cones grow bigger, keep a close eye on their color and texture. They should be a yellowish green to light green and should feel light and dry, when they are ready to be picked. When ready to harvest, the hop cones will exude lupulin, the yellow powder in the center of the cone. It should make your hands feel sticky and fragrant with the smell of hops. If the hops are not yet ready to be harvested, the cones will appear too green and will feel damp in your hand.

Harvest Time!

When you decide to harvest your crop of hops, which will typically be in late August or September, cut the training string at the top and let the bines lay down on the ground. You can then pick off the hop cones and prepare to dry them. Keep in mind, that the first years plant may look a little thin, but the following year it will yield more hops, as the plant will have a more developed root system.

Drying

You can dry your hops by using a food dehydrator, or if you don't have access to a food dehydrator, you can dry them in an oven slowly on a very low temperature. You can also pick the cones and set them outside to dry on a screen, but keep the cones out of direct sunlight, and ensure adequate air circulation when drying. They should feel papery when dry, but don't dry them so long that they turn brown. To determine if they are dry enough, pull the cone open, if the petals

break off easily from the stem they should be good to use or store in an airtight bag. If the petals still feel sticky and do not release from the stem easily, let them dry a little longer.

Use

Homegrown hops are best suited to be used for flavoring, aromatics and dry hopping your brew. Toss them into your brew the last 15 minutes or less for intense flavors and aromas, or add to your secondary for dry hopping. Using them for bittering is not ideal because you would have to use your best guess as to what the Alpha Acid levels may be. Not saying they couldn't be used for bittering but it may take some trial and error to get your bitterness levels to where you like them.

Keep in mind that different cultivars of hops grow better in different climates. Here is a list of which do better where:

Cascade: 4.5-7.0% alpha. Grows well in all climates. Susceptible to aphid.

Centennial: 9.5 -11.5% alpha. Grows well in all climates. Susceptible to downy mildew.

Chinook: 11.0-13.0% alpha. Grows well in dry, hot climates. Does not grow well in moist climates. Subject to spider mite. Great ornamental hop.

Columbus: 14.5-15.5% alpha. Grows well in dry hot climates. Vigorous but susceptible to mildew diseases.

Glacier: 5.0-6.0% alpha. Grows well in all climates.

Golding: 4.0-5.0% alpha. Grows well in mild, moist climates. Does okay in hot climates.

Northern Brewer: 8.0-10.0% alpha. Adequate in temperate climates but has difficulty growing when under heat stress. Susceptible to downy mildew.

Nugget: 12.0-14.0% alpha. Grows well in all climates.

Tettnang: 4.0-5.0% alpha. Grows well in a moderate climate. Suffers a little in hot climates.

Willamette: 4.0-6.0% alpha. Grows well in all climates.