

FAQ

I'm having trouble maintaining the temperature of my mash. What's the best way to do that?

The mash is an integral part of your brewing process, but maintaining the temperature within the desired range can be difficult with just a small amount of water. When the mash approaches the high end of the temperature range specified in your recipe, turn off the heat, and immediately cover your brew kettle, leaving the thermometer inside. If you're using an electric stove, move the pot to another burner until the stove has cooled. While it's important that all the grains in your mash are wet, stirring frequently will cause your mash to cool, so open the pot only about every 15 minutes to measure temperature and stir. As you stir, be sure to turn the heat back on to raise your temperature back to the high end of the temperature range your recipe calls for.

My beer has bubbled through the top of the fermenter and into my airlock. What should I do?

Don't fret! Mix a small amount of sanitizer in a bowl. Dunk your length of plastic tubing in the sanitizer. Remove the airlock and rinse out any residue. Insert the rubber stopper on the top of the fermenter and insert the end of the plastic tubing into the hole. Run the plastic tubing to the bowl of sanitizer, and submerge the end - this is called a blow-off tube. When yeast activity has subsided, simply remove the tubing, sanitize your airlock, and re-attach it.

My beer stopped bubbling after only a day or two. Is it finished?

The answer here, unfortunately, is almost universally no. Or more accurately, not just yet. Although seeing activity in your airlock is a sign that fermentation is occurring, a lack thereof doesn't mean it's complete, only that it's slowed down. The only true way to tell whether your beer has finished fermenting is to measure the final gravity, or FG. If your FG is within a few points of what your recipe calls for, the process has nearly finished. However, waiting a few extra days gives your beer more time to mature prior to bottling. If you measure your FG to find it's not close to your target, wait a few more days and check again. If the measurement hasn't changed, see the answer below!

FAQ

My fermentation is stuck. What do I do?

Yeast are fickle organisms, and are doing all the hard work to convert your wort's sugars into alcohol. A stuck fermentation can have many causes, but typically points to an issue with the health of your yeast. Especially in colder weather, a simple test is to bring your fermenter to a warmer location, near a heat source. This will often reawaken the yeast into action to finish fermenting your beer. If this doesn't change anything, try pitching a small amount of yeast - this will most likely resolve the issue.

My beer may be infected, but I'm not sure. How can I tell?

Unfortunately there is no surefire way to tell if a batch of beer has been contaminated. There are some common off-flavors which can affect your beer, but don't necessarily mean it's infected (see below), but a foul taste and odor are common signs that something may be wrong. Visually, the appearance of a thick skin, also known as a pellicle, is a sign that you may have a contaminated batch of beer. Before brewing your next batch, thoroughly scrub and sanitize all of your equipment!

My beer is too cloudy. How do I fix it?

Cloudiness is an age-old issue for home brewers. Without fine filtration, removing fine particles and haze-causing proteins from your beer can be difficult, but there are several tactics which are quite effective. Irish Moss is the most commonly-used additive, and is typically added about 15 minutes from the end of the boil. Whirlfloc tablets, a derivative of Irish Moss, are also a good option to reduce haziness. Whether you choose to use an additive or not, taking care to avoid disturbing the trub at the bottom of the fermenter when bottling is the most important step that can clarify your beer.

FAQ

My beer has some off-flavors. What went wrong?

Diacetyl/DMS: described as a buttery or butterscotch flavor, this can be caused by cooling your wort too slowly or by leaving your pot fully-covered during the boil.

Oxidation: a wet cardboard or sherry-like flavor which can arise due to the wort being significantly exposed to oxygen above 80F (27C).

Skunky: Exposing beer to direct sunlight or bright fluorescent lights for long periods of time can cause a skunked or musky taste.

Astringent: a puckering or bitter quality (an excessively high PH) which may result from steeping grains for too long, or from using scalding water to sparge your mash.

Estery: a fruity, banana-like taste desirable in many Belgian beer styles. This flavor can be attributed to fermenting beer at a temperature higher than the yeast is designed to handle.

My beer has no carbonation. What gives?

There are a number of factors at work in the carbonation process, including temperature (60-70 degrees [15-21C] is ideal), the type of beer, even the health of your yeast. Although most beers will be perfectly drinkable after 5-7 days, flavors will continue to deepen and develop as your beer conditions in the bottle. This is especially true for high ABV beers such as imperial stouts and barley wines, which often carbonate much more slowly. If you open a beer and it's not as carbonated as you'd like, don't give up just yet - good things take time!

My beer tastes good, but the ABV is much lower than I'd anticipated. Did I do something wrong?

Lower than expected ABV (or a low OG) can be the result of several issues, mainly during the mashing process. Maintaining temperatures within the desired mash range can be difficult with such a small amount of water and grain. Even if your mash temperature fluctuates slightly, this can impact your efficiency (the amount of fermentable sugar you extract per pound of grain). See above for some tips on maintaining your temperature during the mashing process. "Topping off" with additional water before fermentation can also dilute your beer slightly and lower the ABV.

We're always here to help you work through any issues you experience with the brewing process. Feel free to email us at michael@boxbrewkits.com.