

HOW TO: HOMEMADE GINGER BEER

If the last few months of 2011 were as action packed for you as they were for us, then you're probably itching for a vacation as badly as we are.... Now that 2012 has taken shape and the New Years bubbly is but a distant, albeit flat memory, we're looking ahead to warmer days and colder beverages and the anticipation of sand between our toes. Yeah, I know, it's only March and it's fixing to rain but desire is a substantive force. Seasonal obstacles withstanding, I find I can always fall back on those transportive, time-and-place flavors as a suitable stand-in until opportunity presents for the real thing.

So, in the spirit of vacations yet to be, enjoy the taste of someplace more a little warmer, a little bubblier and with a satisfying bite end the end....it may sound like hyperbole, but I assure you it's not.

HOMEMADE GINGER BEER:

1-2 large fresh ginger roots: grated, chopped or sliced fine
2 cups of fine granulated sugar
1 gallon of bottled spring water
1 1/2 teaspoons of bread yeast
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
juice from one fresh lemon and/or lime plus zest

EQUIPMENT: 1 gallon plastic water jug, food processor (optional).



1. Wash and dry the ginger root. If you have a food processor, use it to puree the root to fine pulp. If you don't have a processor, use a cheese grater to grate the root or chop with a knife as finely as you can. The goal is to get the ginger bits small enough that the juice will release when boiled.



2. Pour a 1 gallon jug of natural spring water into a large cooking pot and place on stove. Add the ginger, cayenne pepper and lemon. Add sugar and stir until well dissolved. Boil mixture for 20-30 minutes.



3. While the mixture boils, reconstitute the yeast by dissolving a teaspoon of sugar in warm (not hot) water, about 70 degrees. Sprinkle, don't stir the yeast into the mixture and let sit for 15 mins. until foamy.
4. When the mixture is done boiling, let cool to lukewarm temperature. Placing the pot in a sink of ice water will speed up the cooling process. Once the liquid has cooled, strain through a sieve or cheesecloth and use a funnel pour into the 1 gallon plastic water jug.
5. Stir the reconstituted yeast and add to the jug with the ginger liquid. Stir well, and seal loosely by stretching a washed balloon over the lip of the bottle or drape a clean cloth over the opening. You want to allow gas to escape once the yeast kicks in. Place jug in a warm location but not in direct sunlight.
6. After a few hours you will begin seeing tiny bubbles in the jug. The timing will vary, depending on how warm it is and how well the yeast kicks in. When you see a steady stream of bubbles your ginger beer is ready - you'll be shocked at how explosively carbonated it is!



7. To store your ginger beer, you can cut a small hole in the cap of your 1 gallon jug (to allow gas to escape) and place in the fridge. The cool temperature in the Fridge will halt the fermentation. when serving, pour into a decorative glass bottle but do not store this way as your bottle could explode. Ginger beer keeps for three days in your fridge. Enjoy!

GET CREATIVE:

Variations on the mix...

- Add 1/3 cup of fresh ginger juice for an extra kick
- Substitute 1/4 cup of the white sugar with brown sugar for a slightly darker beer with a richer flavor
- Add 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar for a smoother mouth feel and more balanced ph
- Add 1 teaspoon anise seeds for a deeper flavor
- Steep 1 teaspoon of dried lavender in the mixture while hot, add a little extra sugar to taste if mixture becomes bitter
- grate orange zest into your mixture to taste

GET TIPSY:

Use your homemade brew homemade cocktails:

- Moscow Mule (my favorite),
- Cablegram
- Nor'Easter
- Dark 'n' Stormy