

Beer 101

WHAT IS BEER?

Quite simply, beer is a beverage made with malted cereal grains (which could include barley, wheat, sorghum, rye, corn or rice), hops and water that is fermented by adding yeast. Yeast eats sugar, divides (then multiplies), and produces carbon dioxide and ethanol (alcohol).

Alcohol levels can range from 2% Alcohol by Volume (ABV) to a whopping 15% ABV for Barley Wines. Of course, this description really doesn't do beer justice, does it? Beer is actually quite a complex drink that can take on thousands of interpretations. And for most of us, trying to categorize beer can sometimes be difficult.

BEER TYPES

Ales

Brewed with top fermenting yeast at cellar temperature, ales are fuller-bodied, with nuances of fruit or spice and a pleasantly hoppy finish. Generally robust and complex with a variety of fruit and malt aromas, ales come in many varieties. They could include Bitters, Milds, Abbey Ales, Pale Ales, Nut Browns, etc.

Ales are often darker than lagers, ranging from rich gold to reddish amber. Top fermenting, and more hops in the wort gives these beers a distinctive fruitfulness, acidity and pleasantly bitter seasoning. Ales have a more assertive, individual personality than lager, though their alcoholic strength is the same.

Lagers

Lager originates from the German word lagern which means 'to store' – it refers to the method of storing it for several months in near-freezing temperatures. Crisp and refreshing with a smooth finish from longer aging, lagers are the world's most popular beer (this includes pilseners).

A lager, which can range from sweet to bitter and pale to black, is usually used to describe bottom-fermented brews of Dutch, German, and Czech styles. Most, however, are a pale to medium colour, have high carbonation, and a medium to high hop flavour.

Stouts & Porters

There's very little distinction between a Porter and a Stout, but they do have their differences.

Porter is a dark, almost black, fruity-dry, top fermenting style. An ale, porter is brewed with a combination of roasted malt to impart flavour, colour and aroma. Stout is also a black, roast brew made by top fermentation.

Stout, not as sweet to the taste, features a rich, creamy head and is flavoured and coloured by barley. Stouts often use a portion of unmalted roasted barley to develop a dark, slightly astringent, coffee-like character.



Malts

Generally dark and sweeter in flavour, malts contain hints of caramel, toffee, and nuts. They can be light to full bodied.

BEER STYLES

In addition to type, a beer's character can be described by its style. Listed below are some of the many different styles of beer carried at the Beer Store.

Amber

A very versatile beer, Amber beers are full bodied malt aromas with hints of caramel, these beers could be either lager or ale.

Blonde

Blonde ales are very pale in colour and tend to be clear, crisp, and dry, with low-to-medium bitterness and aroma from hops and some sweetness from malt.

Brown

Dark amber or brown in colour, brown ale have evidence of caramel and chocolate flavours and may have a slight citrus accent or be strong, malty or nutty, depending on the area of brewing.

Cream

A very mild, sweetish, golden style of ale.

Dark

Dark ale is a British type beer, combining hops, yeast and a blend of malts. It's a medium chestnut brown colour, with a delicate fruity smell and robust, malty character.

Fruit

Most fruit beers are ales however, they typically do not carry an ale character. In order to allow for the fruit flavor to come through nicely, the malt's flavor is not dominant and there is a low bitterness level to the beer.

Golden

First developed in the UK, Golden ales are straw coloured with a slight hint of citrus and vanilla. The beer can sometimes contain spicier flavours.

Honey

A full-bodied beer with a creamy texture and copper colour. Honey beers are slightly sweet with hints of caramel.

India Pale Ale

A hopper version of pale ale. Originally brewed in England with extra hops to survive the journey to British troops stationed in India.



Light

Extremely light in colour and mild in flavour. Light beer has fewer calories and/or lower alcohol content.

Lime

Typically, light in flavour with a refreshing lime taste. The intensity of the lime can differ from very subtle to strong.

Pale

Pale ale has a fruity, copper-coloured style. It originated from England. Pale ales are robust beers that can be enjoyed with strongly spiced foods.

Pilsner

Made with neutral and hard water. Tend to be golden in colour with a dry, crisp, and somewhat bitter flavour. Pilsner stands out from other lagers due to its more distinctive hop taste.

Red

Red ales can either be red or light brown in colour. They are moderate to heavy in flavour and contain hints of caramel that is offset by the predominant hop characteristic of the beer.

Strong

This is a broad grouping that can describe any beer over 7% ABV. Strong beers are typically dark in colour, some are almost black. Different styles can include old ales, double IPAs, and barleywines.

Wheat

Light and easy to drink with very little aftertaste. Wheat provides a soft character to beer and is sometimes hazy or cloudy with a touch of spice notes.

Article written by: The Beer Store, Canada

