

The background of the cover is a photograph of a craft beer bar. In the foreground, a burger with a dark, crusty bun, pickles, red onions, tomato, and lettuce sits on a piece of parchment paper. Behind it are two tall glasses of beer; the one in front is dark with a thick head of foam, while the one behind is lighter. The background is blurred, showing warm, bokeh lights from the bar.

# Craft Beer GUIDE

# Blue-Ribbon Beers

Beer competitions allow homebrewers and professionals alike to bring their top brews to be judged.

The public can attend and sample these top bottles, usually for a fee. Here are a few of the top competitions in the U.S.

## WORLD BEER CUP

The World Beer Cup was started in 1996 by The Brewers Association. It's often called "the Olympics of Beer," the Brewers Association says, and is held annually at the Craft Brewers Conference and BrewExpo America. Beers are judged in more than 100 categories by more than 200 beer professionals.

"On a professional level, beer and cider evaluation is a form of peer review," said Chris Williams, World Beer Cup competition director. "The results are public, so consumers can learn what beverages meet a high level of quality and what beverages exemplify certain styles as interpreted by the judges."

## GREAT AMERICAN BEER FESTIVAL

This competition is blind-judged by industry professionals who strive to identify the three entries that best represent each category as described. Judges do not judge their own product or any product in which they might have an interest. Gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded in each category.

Gold medals recognize a "world-class beverage that accurately exemplifies the specified style, displaying the proper balance of taste, aroma and appearance." Silver medals go to excellent beverages that may vary slightly from criteria but maintain close adherence to the style and still display excellent taste, aroma and appearance. Bronze medal beers are "fine" examples of the style that may vary from criteria or have minor deviations in taste, aroma or appearance.

Judges may elect to award all, some or none of the medals in a given category.

## NATIONAL HOMEBREW COMPETITION

The National Homebrew Competition is for amateur brewers of beer, mead and cider. New in 2025 are a German Pils category and expanded mead and cider categories. Entrants cannot use professional equipment or other means provided by professional brewers or breweries. The competition is open to members of the American Homebrewers Association and is conducted in rounds. First-round competition is limited to 750 entries per site and entrants can choose any site based on availability.





# All About Malts

Often referred to as the soul of the beer, malts are germinated cereal grains that provide the sugar for fermentation and contribute to a beer's flavor, color and body.

The most common malt comes from barley, but other grains are used, such as wheat, rye and oats.

## THE MALTING PROCESS

Malting readies the cereal grains to be used in the beer brewing process. In the first step of malting, the grain is immersed in water until it absorbs half its weight. Then it's moved to germination rooms at a controlled temperature and regularly turned. Lastly, the grain is placed into a kiln for drying.

During this process, the grains are germinated in a carefully controlled process that releases specific enzymes and reduces the complexity of starch. The simpler sugars created in malting will be metabolized by yeasts during the brewing process.

## SOME BASIC MALTS

Some basic malts used in beers are:

- **Pilsners:** A pale malt with a delicate taste of cereal and acacia honey.
- **Pale:** A malt created at higher drying temperatures than Pilsners, it has notes of



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bread and biscuits.

- **Vienna:** This malt was developed in the 19th century by Anton Dreher. It tastes of caramel and has some roasted notes.

- **Munich:** Munich malts can be used on their own or to enrich beers made with more simple malts. It has a more distinctive caramel taste than the

Vienna malt with a bready flavor.

- **Smoked:** This usually refers to a smoked Pilsner malt that comes from oak or other wood used during the drying process.

Specialty malts can be added to beer, usually in smaller amounts than the base malt. Some examples of specialty malts are chocolate malts, cara-

mel malts and crystal malts.

## USING MALT

Malt provides sugar to the brewing process, feeding the yeast used to ferment the beer with. The fermentation creates carbonation and alcohol in the finished product, as well as some additional flavors. The malted barley helps the brewer

get the most nutrients and sugar out of the grains used in the beer recipe; that step is called the mashing stage.

During mashing, the malted barley is crushed and mixed with hot water. The liquid, or wort, is then separated from the spent grains and boiled, often with hops, and fermented into beer.



# THC/CBD Hits Beer Lineups

Craft breweries are known for their innovation and the latest ingredient to hit bottles is THC and CBD.

THC, or tetrahydrocannabinol, and CBD — cannabidiol — are two of the main chemical compounds in marijuana. As more states legalize these ingredients, brewers are adding them to their product lineups.

## BENEFITS OF THC AND CBD

THC is the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis. CBD is also derived from cannabis, but it's not psychoactive, so the user doesn't get the usual high from marijuana. Both compounds may help with conditions such as anxiety, inflammation, pain and more. Several craft breweries in states where CBD and THC are legal are selling beverages that incorporate the ingredients as an alternative to alcoholic beverages.

## SOME BEVERAGES TO TRY

If you're ready to take the plunge, there are some beverages out there to try. Talk to your local liquor store about the availability of THC/CBD beverages in your state and research the laws around them before you partake. As always, never drive or operate

heavy machinery while impaired.

**Lagunitas Brewing's Hi-Fi Sessions:** This sparkling beverage is flavored with hops, but has zero carbs, zero calories and quite a bit of THC and CBD. It's no surprise Lagunitas is a leader here. Its first brewery parties started at 4:20 p.m., the brewery was once

shut down for not selling weed, and founder Tony Magee always says "it takes a lot of good weed to make great beer."

**NoDa Brewing's Happy Bird:** Founded in 2011, the Charlotte, North Carolina, brewery makes these non-alcoholic, THC-laced seltzers alongside its regular line of

beers. Happy Bird comes in four flavors: Grapefruit hibiscus, lavender lemon, ginger lime and, new to the market, pomegranate citrus.

**Untitled Art:** The "artists of flavor" at Untitled Art have a few cannabis products alongside their hard seltzers and craft beers. Mystic Orbit is a THC soda that includes four

milligrams of hemp-derived THC in a range of flavors that include Galactic Grape, Cosmic Orange, Lunar Lemon and Green Canvas Lemonade Tea. The Goodwell line is sparkling CBD water with 20 mg of broad-spectrum hemp CBD in fruity flavors such as grapefruit, strawberry and blackberry.



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# Pouring a Perfect Pint

Pouring a beer properly isn't as straightforward as pulling a tap or popping a top and dumping out the drink.

A proper pour can enhance the flavor and appearance of a beer, correctly controlling the release of carbon dioxide so that beer's aroma and mouth-feel are as the brewer intended.

## GLASSWARE

First, choose the right glass.

Pint glasses are a common choice for a range of beers and come in two sizes, 16 ounces and 20 ounces. The larger glass, called Imperial or Nonic, has a slight ridge towards the top and is preferred for beers with crowning heads. The svelte curves of the Weizen glass are made for wheat beer and spotlight the beer's color while leaving plenty of room for fluffy heads associated with wheat beer. Pilsner glasses are 12 ounces and shaped like a horn and may come on a small stem (this is called a pokal, or European pilsner glass). Lagers and gooses are great in these glasses, which show off the beer's effervescence.

If all of this seems overwhelming, pint glasses are perfect for just about everything. Lighter beers go in taller glasses and darker beers in shorter, wider glasses. With



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that rule of thumb, any glass can become a beer glass. Even champagne flutes.

## TEMPERATURE

Temperatures affect how a beer tastes. Generally speaking, cold temperatures are great for lighter beers and warmer temperatures for

darker beers. Consult the packaging or talk to the pros at your local liquor store for the proper serving temperature for your favorite brews.

## POURING THE PERFECT PINT

Start by making sure the glassware you've chosen is

clean and free of any dirt or residue and is appropriate for the beer you're about to pour. Hold the glass at a 45-degree angle to prevent too much foam from forming too early. Pour the beer slowly down the side, aiming at the inside wall of the glass. As it fills, slowly straighten the glass, aiming

for about an inch of foam at the top.

Before sipping, observe the color and clarity of the beer. Take a deep breath in, capturing the aroma and prime your taste buds. Sip, then let the beer linger in the mouth while analyzing the taste and texture.



# Breweries Add Punch to Lineups

Craft brewers are the beating heart of innovation in the beer market and nothing shows this better than an explosion of flavors in craft brews.

Here are some beers to watch for with fantastic flavors, such as black currants, vanilla, whiskey barrels, tropical fruits and more.

**Allagash Little Grove Black-currant:** This sparkling fruited ale is a little tart and a lot refreshing. It combines the tart flavor of black currant with a Belgian-style beer. It has 3.8% ABV and is available on tap or in 12-ounce cans. Also see: New Terrain Brewing Against the Currant Gose, Copper Brewing Blackcurrant Sour.

**Blackhorse Brewing Vanilla Cream Ale:** Refreshing and smooth, Blackhorse's vanilla bean cream ale combines American ale with smooth, creamy vanilla beans into a cream soda-type beer. It has a 4.8% ABV and comes in 12-ounce cans and on draft. Also see: Kentucky Vanilla Barrel Cream Ale, Sun King Orange Vanilla Sunlight Cream Ale.

**Boulevard Bourbon Barrel Quad:** This abbey-style quadrupel has notes of cherry, toffee and vanilla and is aged in oak Holladay Distillery bourbon barrels. Also see: New Holland Brewing



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Dragon's Milk Bourbon-Barrel Aged Stout, Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale.

**Golden Road Brewing Mango Cart:** A wheat ale spiked with mango, this brew also comes in a spicy blend and a non-alcoholic brew. Golden Road also makes other tropical-tinged brews, such as

Guava Cart. Also see: Lupulin Tropical Fun Pants, Heavy Seas TropiCannon.

**Evil Twin Brewing Ashtray Heart NYC Version:** New York-based Evil Twin's smoked (yes, smoked) porter comes back with a city flair. It has an 8.9% ABV. Also see: Jack's Abby Smoke & Dagger, Dark Horse

Brewing Fore Smoked Stout.

**Florida Avenue You're My Boy Blue!:** A blueberry wheat ale that won a silver medal at the Great American Beer Festival, this beer is a hazy blue-purple amber ale with plenty of blueberry flavor. Also see: UFO Maine Blueberry, Atlantic Bar Harbor

Blueberry Ale.

**Dogfish Head Tea You Later:** A filtered IPA with organic rice tea incorporated into the mash and flavors of white tea with Citra hoops. It has light tea and citrus notes with undertones of sweet malt. Also see: The Rare Barrel Mister Tea.

# Hop Water Surges in Popularity

Hop water is a carbonated water flavored with hops, which are also used to flavor beer, giving drinkers the flavor of beer without the alcohol.

Sales increased 142.5% in 2022 over the previous year, making it a rapidly growing segment of the brewing market. The drink has a crisp, refreshing flavor with notes of citrus, pine or even fruits, depending on the type of hops used. It's usually gluten free and is low- or no-calorie as well.

Here are some hop waters to keep an eye out for in your local liquor store:

**Lagunitas Hoppy Refresher:**

This Lagunitas brew is made with Citra, Equinox and Centennial hops for a fruity, refreshing drink. The brewery says it has notes of bubble gum, lime, lemon, tangerine and a hint of pine. It comes in plain, berry lemon and blood orange flavors.

**HOP WTR:** HOP WTR infuses their drinks with adaptogenic and nootropic ingredients — supplements that target serotonin and dopamine — to help drinkers unwind without the hangover. It comes in a variety of flavors, including iced tea with lemonade, citrus flavors, fruit flavors and more.

**Hoplark:** This company started out looking to brew tea

like craft beer, adding hops and omitting sugar, additives and fermentation. It now has two lines: HopTea and sparkling waters in a variety of flavors. For sour beer lovers, Hoplark has a line of hoppy sours and even a stout style.

**Ghostfish Brewing Company Ghostfizz:** Sparkling

water with citrusy, fruity hops delivers a crisp flavor without calories, carbs, sugar, caffeine, gluten or alcohol. It comes in blood orange and key lime flavors.

**Sierra Nevada Hop Splash:** Sierra Nevada's take on hop water is infused with Citra and Amarillo hops that gives it a

bright, tropical flavor. It's brewed with the same water that makes Sierra Nevada's beers so great.

**H2OPS Sparkling Hop Water:** H2OPS has been making craft-brewed hop water since 2014. Unlike HOPWTR and other brands, it's adaptogen-free for just pure

refreshment. It also comes in grapefruit flavor.

**Athletic Brewing Co. Day-Pack Sparkling Water:** Athletic Brewing carries a full line of non-alcoholic beverages, including the hoppy DayPack drinks. It comes in flavors of black cherry, blood orange, mango and lemon lime.



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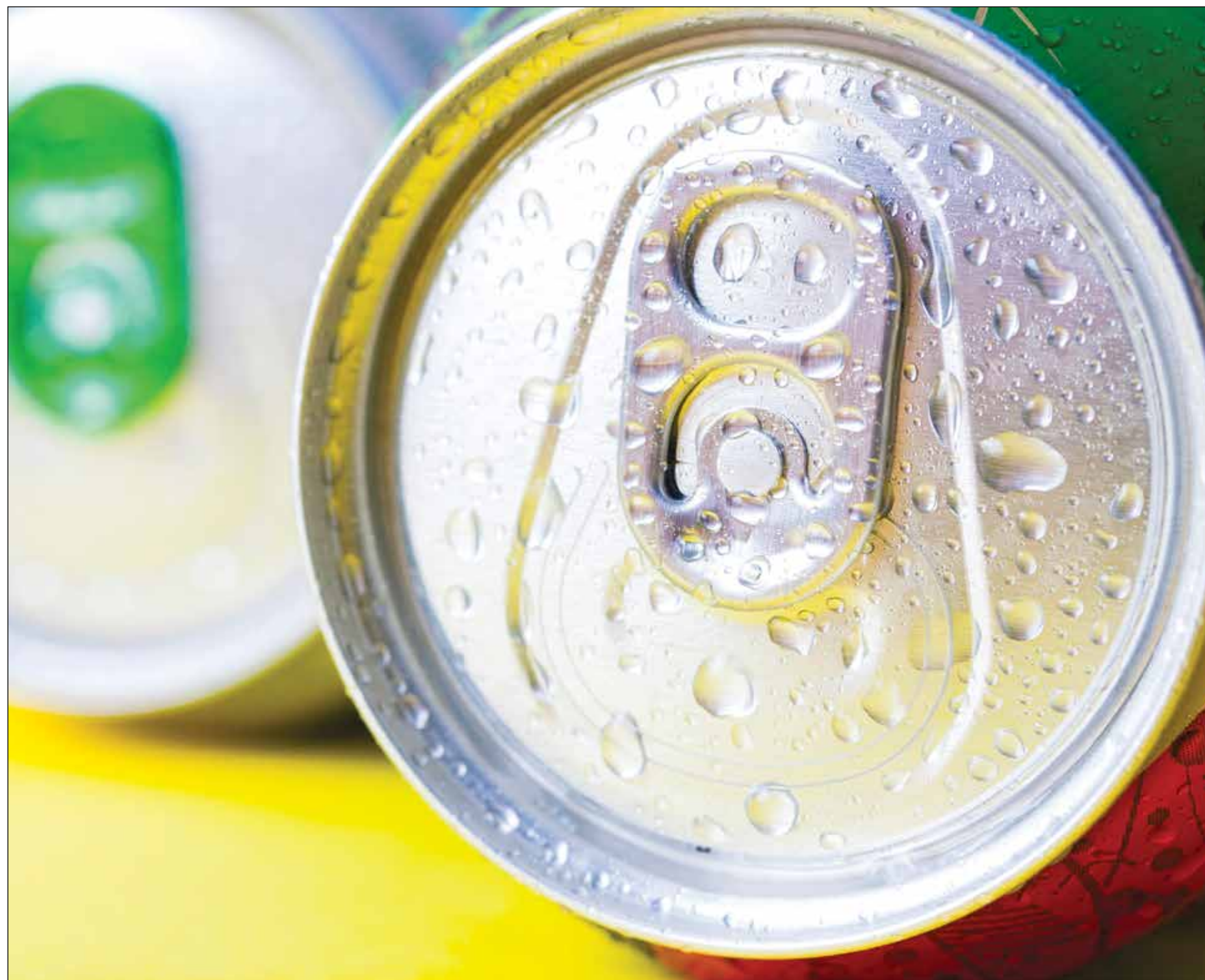
# Breweries Go Big with Stovepipes

Craft breweries are going big with new 19.2-ounce cans called stovepipes.

Beer Marketer's Insights showed stovepipe sales soared, adding \$21 million in sales as tracked by multioutlet and convenience store scans as of late 2024. NielsenIQ data backs that up, showing 22% increases in sales through mid-July 2024.

"It's crazy what's going on," said New Realm Brewing Company's Mitch Steele at the Virginia Brewers Conference in Richmond. He says the big beers were not part of the company's plan, but has become critical to the company's success. New Realm brews available in stovepipes include Hazy Like a Fox IPA, a double dry-hopped beer with El Dorado and Azacca hops. It has notes of pineapple and tangerine in a pale gold, hazy pour.

For brewers, the stovepipe is easier to fill than the larger stadium-sized 24-ounce can because they don't have to change out equipment from their 12- and 16-ounce cans. For retailers, the popularity spurred them to alter beer aisle layouts, VinePair says, citing Whole Foods and Kroger's changes in 2024. In convenience stores, a huge and important channel for craft brewers, the larger, single-serve packages mean more convenience for customers. Stovepipes mean a quicker,



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easier buy for customers in a hurry.

"It fits an occasion that the consumer has been looking for from the craft segment that we really haven't been in before," Marc Venegoni, vice president of sales at Rhinegeist Brewery

told Sightlines. "It also drives a lot of trial for that consumer, especially within craft space. Instead of committing to buying a six-pack or a 12-pack, they can try something."

Ready to try a stovepipe for yourself? In addition to New

Realm's IPA, look for Founders Brewing Co. All Day IPA, Downeast Cider House Extra Hard Blue Slushie, Victory Brewing Sour Monkey, New Belgium's Voodoo Ranger in a variety of IPAs, Industrial Arts Brewing Company Torque

Wrench, Lawson's Finest Liquids Sip of Sunshine IPA, Lagunitas IPA, Sierra Nevada Big Little Thing Imperial IPA, Knee Deep Deep Haze IPA, Goose Island Tropical Beer Hug, Belching Beaver Phantom Bride IPA and others.