Dr. Latzgo's Bohemian Style Beer Recipe™

BY ROGER LATZGO

BIOGRAPHY OF A BREWER

I began my career as a home brewer in college – with equipment inherited from my prohibition-busting grandfather. It was 1969, New Brunswick, New Jersey. As I reread my brewing log, I note that, "…the attention given to aging, temperature, yeast strain and sterile procedure is not always the most conscientious due to the transient quality of [student] existence… the main concern is quantity and alcohol content (usually 8 to 9%)."

By the early 1970s my techniques were considerably more refined. One year as a chemistry major had taught me the basics lab procedures which I adapted to home brewing. More importantly, I traveled to the lands of great beers – Central European countries like Germany and my ancestral Czechoslovakia. I set out to emulate the depth and subtlety of the greatest beers in the world at home in my kitchen. Dr. Latzgo's Bohemian Style Beer Recipe™ is a culmination of those years of experience in an easy to follow method using inexpensive and easily obtainable equipment and standard kitchen utensils.

EQUIPMENT

(Available at beer/winemaking supply stores. See your Yellow Pages.)

1) A "primary fermentation vessel," capacity 10-20 gallons, made of food-quality plastic. It should have a lid.
2) A "secondary fermentation vessel" capacity 5 gallons, glass or plastic with a small neck that can be fitted with an airlock (I use "office water cooler" style glass jugs).
3) An airlock and bored rubber stopper to fit the secondary fermentation vessel.
4) A specific gravity hydrometer and test cylinder (usually sold together at supply stores).
5) A 2-4 gallon pot of stainless steel or enamel finish (anything else will chemically react with beer). We call this the brew kettle.
6) A beer bottle capper
7) Surgical tubing – ¼ inch and ½ inch diameter, 5 feet of each, with a nylon stop valve to fit the ¼ inch tube.
8) Returnable weight beer bottles and bottle caps
9) A 5 gallon plastic bucket, food-quality (and free of odors of its previous use, if you are recycling one).

INGREDIENTS

(Makes one five gallon batch of Dr. Latzgo's Bohemian Style Beer Recipe™)

One 4 pound can of Edme Pilsner type malt syrup. Lager yeast is included, as are vials of hops extract
2 ounces of loose or compressed dried hops
¼ ounce of Saaz (Bohemian) pelletized hops
2.5 pounds of white granulated sugar
Water to 5 gallons. Use bottled water if your tap water is questionable.

STERILE PROCEDURE

90% pf the stories you've heard about failed batches of homebrew stem from faulty sterile procedures. Since 1969, I have not had one failed batch of beer. It's simple. Wash and sterilize everything that touches the beer. You can use potassium metabisulfide (a homebrew supply item) at 2 oz. Per gallon, or you can use household bleach. While bleach is handy, it is also more difficult to rinse. One tablespoon per gallon of cool water followed by THREE rinsings in warm water will do. There should be NO odor of bleach left.

HELPFUL HINT: ***As you drink your beer, rinse your bottles immediately. This is a timesaver later on.***

THE BEER LOG

Get a notebook and start a detailed beer log. I have done mine by hand in a bound lab book since 1969. Record dates, specific gravity readings at each step and comments on your results.

PROCEDURE

(Be sure to read the entire recipe first!!)

THE BOIL

After storing the can of malt extract in a warm place for several hours, open it and add it to the heated water in your 2-4 gallon brew kettle. The kettle should be about half full. This mix is called wort. Note: Malt extract is sticky and runs very slowly. Don't expect to play cards or talk on the phone while you are at this step. Get the last bit of malt syrup out of the can by ladling it full of some of the heated water and letting it stand a few minutes. Stir gently, then add it to the wort. Repeat if necessary.

Bring the worth to a gentle boil. This is a delicate phase of the process where may things can go wrong. Be sure to stir the wort frequently so no charring occurs. The malt extract must be fully dissolved. There must be enough capacity in the pot to allow for possible frothing. You'll have a sticky mess if your pot is too small or too full. Where are you cooking your brew? On an electric or gas stove? If so, stir frequently to avoid charring the wort. If you have a woodstove, consider cooking your wort

on it. It heats more evenly. Then you can brag about having "firebrewed" beer!

Once the wort has been boiling for at least 12 minutes, begin adding the loose hops, a half ounce at a time, at 20 minute intervals throughout the boil. Add the Saaz hops at the very end of the boiling period, which should total 1 1/2 hours. You can't skimp on boil time.

Carefully pour the hot wort/hops mixture into your primary fermentation vessel which already contains the 2.5 pounds of white sugar. Add cold water up to the volume of about 5 gallons. Stir to make sure all the sugar is dissolved in the wort. Record specific gravity and temperature in your log. Specific gravity should be 1.044 to 1.050.

PITCHING THE YEAST AND PRIMARY FERMENTATION

Remember what I said about reading the entire recipe? As soon as the boil begins, remove 2-4 cups of wort, cool it to about 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and add the packet of dry lager beer yeast. This will activate the yeast, and you will have a vigorous yeast culture to add to the primary fermentor containing your wort.

Now we are ready to "pitch" the yeast, and it is an exciting moment! Add your yeast starter culture to the cooled wort (should be about 70 degrees F) in the primary fermentation vessel. Give it a good stir. Place the lid on the vessel and come back in 12-24 hours. Fermentation should be obvious: a bit of white foam on the surface. Later you'll see quite a head of hops and foam. When the foam reaches its peak, skim it off or you will get excessive bitterness in your beer. Also scrape the "scum" off the sides of the vessel. These are residues of hops proteins and can get sticky later.

SECONDARY FERMENTATION

Check the specific gravity of the beer around the fourth day. When it drops to between 1.012 and 1.035, you may siphon the "beer" into the secondary fermentor. Affix an airlock. This is everybody's favorite (well, second favorite) show-and-tell stage because you can watch the tiny bubbles of CO_2 moving up the sides of the secondary fermentor and making the big "BLOOP" out of the airlock. Allow the fermentation to completely run its course (about 2 weeks). The specific gravity will be about 1.002. The beer should be a clear and brilliant gold color.

BOTTLING

Each 5 gallon batch of beer will require 2 cases and a six-pack of 12 oz. bottles. Follow the sterile procedure when washing bottles. You must leave a bit of air space at the neck of each bottle. Do not use non-returnable bottles.

Siphon the beer into a CLEAN container that will hold 5 gallons. Siphon off about 2 cups of beer and boil it along with 2/3 cups (5.5 oz.) of white sugar. This will raise the specific gravity to about 1.006. Add this to the beer in the 5 gallon container, stir in completely, and you are ready to fill the washed bottles.

Use a surgical hose, 1/4 inch diameter, fitted with a nylon valve on one end, to fill the bottles. Do not try this without a valve—attempting to pinch the hose to stop the flow will cause a mess. Let the beer run down the inside of the bottle, causing as little turbulence and foaming as possible. Have a dependable assistant sterilize the necessary number of caps in a small pot of boiling water for about 2 minutes. Using the bottle capper and sterilized caps, cap the bottles. Store in a cool (32 to 50 F.) dark place.

WAITING, WAITING...

Yes, you must now wait about 3 weeks until the last little bit of sugar you added ferments and produces the CO_2 in each bottle. You may try a "test bottle" before then, but strictly in the name of science (enter comments in your beer log). Plan your next brewing session so you'll never be without homebrew. (Homebrew has a shelf life of 3 to 6 months.)

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

The day your beer is ready is a festive occasion. Put on some of your favorite music. Plan an appropriate menu. Have several bottles at your preferred temperature, get out your favorite glasses and carefully pour your beer. You'll notice a bit of yeast sediment at the bottom of the bottle. This will not harm you, but it will appear cloudy in the glass. A little practice and you'll be able to pour a bottle leaving the sediment behind. I usually swig it down from the all-but-empty bottle! Good vitamins! Rinse the bottle at once. This makes the next washing cycle much easier.

As they say in Bohemia: "Na Zdravie!" (To your health!") Dr. Latzgo's Bohemian Style Beer is now YOUR beer!